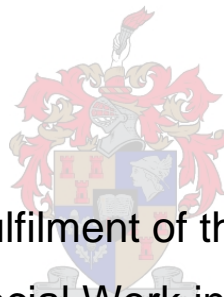


# **PERCEPTIONS OF FRONTLINE SOCIAL WORKERS ON THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE GLOBAL AGENDA FOR SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

by

Netsayi Mwoyounazvo



Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the  
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Social Sciences at the University of Stellenbosch

**SUPERVISOR: Dr ZF ZIMBA**

**CO-SUPERVISOR: PROF LK ENGELBRECHT**

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## DECLARATION

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## ABSTRACT

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), and the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), recognised how the past and current social issues influence communities at local, national and global levels. This resulted in the development of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. Considering that the initiative is aimed at strengthening social work as a profession, this calls for the need to assess how social workers are contributing to the identified pillars of the Global Agenda.

Recognising that not much have been done in Africa at large, it became apparent that there is need to engage with social workers at a local level to acknowledge the significance of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. Therefore, the study intended to gain an understanding on the perceptions of frontline social workers in the South African context on their contributions towards the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development.

This study employed a qualitative research method. A snowball sampling design was used to select participants. The data was qualitatively collected from 17 frontline social workers using in-depth interviews. Data was analysed using thematic analysis. The findings of the empirical investigation show that, although frontline social workers were able to identify some of the practical examples of what they actually do (linking people to resources, working together with other social professionals etc.), most of the participants were not aware of the Global Agenda and its focus at all. Hence, a gap was identified in terms of frontline social workers' involvement at a macro level of intervention. Participants identified their non-involvement in policy formulation (macro) as an obstacle to service delivery as they only become involved at ground (micro) and organisational (mezzo) levels.

Recommendations resulting from the study indicate that it is vital that social workers continue to strengthen their working relationships with individuals and families at a micro level. Moreover, it requires the management of social welfare organisations to engage with intervention processes at a mezzo level, so that the working relationships with the frontline social workers are strengthened, in order to keep each other updated

on current initiatives. Finally, there is a great need for frontline social workers to become more involved at a macro level in order to have an influence on policy formulation. This could enable frontline social workers to gain an understanding of macro contexts and to encourage change at the highest level. This will have a positive impact on the lowest level (micro), as social workers experience the real issues encountered by individuals in their daily interventions.

## OPSOMMING

Die International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), die International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), en die International Council in Social Welfare (ICSW) erken die wyse waarop die kwessies van die verlede en die hede gemeenskappe op plaaslike, nasionale en globale vlakke beïnvloed. Hierdie invloed het die ontwikkeling van die Globale Agenda vir Maatskaplike Werk en Maatskaplike Ontwikkeling tot gevolg gehad. Die doel van die Globale Agenda is om die maatskaplike werk professie uit te bou, en dit het gelei tot die behoefte om vas te stel hoe maatskaplike werkers bydra tot die Globale Agenda.

Tot op hede is daar nie veel navorsing gedoen in Afrika ten opsigte van die Globale Agenda nie, en het dit duidelik geword dat daar wel 'n behoefte is om die bydrae van maatskaplike werkers tot die Globale Agenda op plaaslike vlak te ondersoek.

Hierdie studie gebruik 'n kwalitatiewe navorsingsmetode. 'n Sneeubal steekproefneming is benut om deelnemers te selekteer. Die data is kwalitatief ingesamel van 17 eerste-linie maatskaplike werkers, deur in-diepte onderhoude te voer. Die data is geanaliseer deur 'n tematiese analise.

Die bevindinge van die empiriese ondersoek wys dat, alhoewel die maatskaplike werkers in staat is om van die praktiese voorbeelde van wat hulle eintlik doen (die skakeling van mense en hulpbronne, samewerking met ander maatskaplike professionele persone, ens.) te identifiseer, was die meeste van die deelnemers nie bewus van die Globale Agenda en sy fokus nie. Om hierdie rede, is 'n gaping geïdentifiseer in terme van die betrokkenheid van die grondvlak maatskaplike werkers by die makrovlak van intervensie. Deelnemers het hul onbetrokkenheid in die formulering van beleid (op makrovlak) as 'n hindernis geïdentifiseer, aangesien hulle slegs by mikro- en makro intervensies betrokke is.

Aanbevelings ten opsigte van die studie dui aan dat dit essensieel is dat maatskaplike werkers voortgaan om hulle werksverhoudinge met individue en gesinne op makrovlak te versterk. Dit word ook van organisasies se bestuur verwag om deel te word van die

intervensie-prosesse op mesovlak, sodat die werksverhoudinge met maatskaplike werkers versterk kan word.

Laastens is daar 'n groot behoefte vir grondvlak maatskaplike werkers om meer betrokke te raak op makrovlak ten einde 'n invloed te hê op beleidsformulering. Hierdie betrokkenheid sal grondvlak maatskaplike werkers in staat stel om 'n groter begrip vir en ondersteuning aan verandering te bied op die hoogste vlak. Dit sal 'n positiewe impak hê op die laagste (mikro) vlak van beleidsformulering, aangesien die ervarings van maatskaplike werkers werklike kwessies van individue insluit wat hulle teëkom in hul daaglikse intervensies.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 PRELIMINARY STUDY AND RATIONALE

Several different perceptions on globalisation and its impact have emerged within social work dialogue. This developing dialogue has contributed to the identification of various global challenges, including the impact of inequalities, effects of migration, natural disasters and an increase in conflicts across the world (Jones & Truell, 2012). According to Albrow (1990:8), “globalisation can refer to all those processes by which the people of the world are incorporated into a single world society”. Furthermore, globalisation has been identified as the intensification of the worldwide social relations, which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa (Giddens, 1990:64). Therefore, globalisation involves the interaction and movement of people and goods, which result in local and international experiences influencing each other (Ahmadi, 2003; Findlay & McCormack, 2005; Sogren & Nathaniel, 2015).

Globalisation and evolving economies have been argued to cause global policymakers, internationally and locally, to accept a neoliberal approach to social work (Engelbrecht, 2015:318). Neoliberalism seems to be associated, inter alia, with the de-professionalising of the social work profession (Engelbrecht, 2015). This idea is supported, for example, by Dlamini and Sewpaul (2015), who remarked that neoliberalism seems to promote a decline in the recognition of the social work profession. Hence, the introduction of a Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development is perceived as a rescuing approach for the profession within an increasingly neoliberal world. It can be argued that the ability of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), and all other involved parties, to pay attention to global social issues at multiple levels, have resulted in the transformation of the global definition of social work and the formation of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development (Jones and Truell, 2012).

The recognition of the global commitment of social workers to the respect for human dignity and rights was the convincing idea that influenced the establishment of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. (IASSW, ICSW & IFSW, 2014:3). The process of the Global Agenda commenced in 2004 and was launched in Hong Kong in 2010 at a world conference with an average of 3000 attending participants. According to Jones and Truell (2012), the Global Agenda was developed with the aim to reinforce the importance of social work and its recognition as a profession against the backdrop of globalisation.

The Global Agenda was formed with the intention to ensure that social workers would gain more recognition and become more involved in policy development processes (Jones & Truell, 2012). It serves to assist in strengthening the position of social work as a profession, with the participation of social workers, students, practitioners, researchers and social development professionals, to ensure these professionals are able to work towards promoting global social change (Gray & Webb, 2014). Hence, the Global Agenda can be categorised as a campaigning device for social work professional self-promotion (Gray & Webb, 2014:347). Jones and Truell (2012:456) also shared a similar understanding by describing the recognition of the Global Agenda as a representation of the re-positioning of the social work profession globally. This re-positioning of the profession can be identified by reflecting on the four pillars of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development.

The first pillar is the **promotion of social and economic equalities**. This pillar focuses on attaining social and economic equality at micro, mezzo and macro levels, through working towards reducing the widening gap between the poor and the rich. The second pillar aims to **promote the dignity and worth of people**. It is proposed that this will be achieved through the ability to promote equal social, economic, cultural and political rights for all people. The third pillar focuses on **working towards environmental sustainability**, which is promoted through engaging in programmes that are sustainable and protect the natural environment. The fourth pillar is about **strengthening recognition of the importance of human relations**, aiming to support the well-being of all people through social integration and cohesion of vulnerable individuals, groups and communities (IASSW, ICSW & IFSW, 2010). The identification of the above-highlighted pillars of the Global Agenda encourages the three organisations (IASSW, IFSW & ICSW) as representatives of the profession to



suggest best practices and approaches for actionalising these objectives (Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development, 2014).

The introduction of the Global Agenda received overwhelming worldwide support. As a result, social work practitioners, educators, policy and development workers, became more involved in organising conferences, discussions and other means to ensure they remain committed to the implementation of the agreed upon pillars (Gray & Webb, 2014; Jones, 2012). This led to the holding of a post-conference consultation in Ghana in November 2011, where the focus was on the actions required by organisations to ensure they implement the four pillars in their fields. This development promoted the further realisation of new platforms in relation to the advancement of the four pillars. Furthermore, it encouraged the carrying out of research that promote positive outcomes in social work and social development (Jones & Truell, 2012:459). The three organisations (IASSW, IFSW & ICSW) agreed on a commitment to promote a global network of regional centres to support the implementation of the agenda. In addition, the Stockholm World Conference in 2012 endorsed participants to pay attention to the implementation and suggestable strategies for promoting the Global Agenda pillars.

Through such collaboration and support, the Global Agenda seeks to assist social workers in identifying how global issues can influence specific local realities. Raninga and Zelnick (2014) pointed out that besides the fact that political and socio-economic backgrounds differ across countries, there are still shared features across the global North and South that influence social work practice. The IASSW, ICSW and IASW (2014), in respect of this idea, stated that even though the pattern of social problems might differ in specific contexts, social workers have testified that they still detect similar general tendencies. In a 2007 study conducted in the North American Region, it was discovered that 13.3 million children in the United States were living in poverty (Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development, 2014:45). In Europe, social workers observed that there has been an increase in the number of people living in poverty, such as people who are: homeless, involved in criminal activities, and subjected to family violence. These factors have affected the re-birth of more non-governmental organisations (Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development, 2014:32). Moreover, it was also reported that in the Asia-Pacific region, inequality in wealth and income has increased within all countries (Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development, 2014). Similar findings were also reported in Africa, where it was revealed that the distribution of wealth has become unequal within most countries. As

a result, this contributed to a larger population living in poverty (Africa Progress Panel, 2013b).

The above findings clearly highlight the importance of the Global Agenda and reiterate the significance of social work researchers, social work educators and social development practitioners in ensuring that the Global Agenda transforms into planning and action at local phases, beyond international involvements and agreements (Altunay, 2016; Lyons, 2006; Sogren & Nathaniel, 2015).

Issues such as those outlined above are also prevalent in the South African context. Engelbrecht and Strydom (2015:2) argue that even though South Africa is one of the countries in Africa that has a well-structured welfare system, it is still confronted with one of the highest uneven income distributions in the world, with approximately 41.4% of people living beneath the poverty line (Statistics South Africa, 2013). Social welfare in South Africa is guided by various policy documents. These include the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996, the White Paper for Social Welfare of 1997, the Social Assistance Act No. 595 of 1992, and the Comprehensive Report on the review of the White Paper for Social Welfare of 2016, amongst others. As social workers make use of these documents to guide their practice, it is important to investigate how these documents, and resulting social work practice, contribute towards the fulfilment of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. This will be explored through gaining an in-depth understanding of how frontline social workers are managing to implement these guiding documents in promoting social and economic equality, dignity and worth of people, environmental sustainability and strengthening of human relations (IASSW, ICSW & IFSW, 2010).

Furthermore, such circumstances necessitate for social work unity and more engagement, both locally and internationally, as well as inter and intra professionally. Therefore, this specifies that the field of social work requires combined efforts from all role players in order to enhance the progress on the implementation of the Global Agenda's four pillars into practice at local, regional, national and international levels (Yuen, Rollet & Bailey, 2010). Given the fact that there are so many policy documents and acts guiding social work practice in each context, it is important to recognise the challenges that social work professionals face at a micro, mezzo and macro level. Hence, this strongly identifies the link between the Global Agenda and an ecological systems perspective (Pawar & Weil, 2016). There is thus a further need to gain an in-

depth understanding of how frontline social work at a micro level relates to work being done at mezzo and macro levels. This is based on Engelbrecht's (2008:172) concerns, who regards social workers to be caught up in clients presenting issues as a by-product of normal casework intervention. Against this backdrop, Engelbrecht (2018) questions if this should be the best that social workers, at the frontline, can offer? As a result, questions can be raised as to whether social workers are actually contributing to the social advancement of societies when their primary focus is on social support and identification of resources. This study will explore whether, considering globalisation challenges and the four pillars of the Global Agenda, such small gains are worthwhile when considering social workers' interaction within micro, mezzo and macro levels (Engelbrecht, 2018:172).

Seeing that little tangible evidence has been delivered in the South African context on the contributions being made by frontline social workers towards the four pillars of the Global Agenda at a micro, mezzo and macro levels, this study will be timely in generating new knowledge and insights for the next international conference on social work in 2020, which will be hosted by the IFSW and the IASSW. Through such a review, the researcher aims to develop insight into how South African frontline social workers contribute towards the Global Agenda through the delivery of local service rendering in support of both local, national and international needs and realities (Jones & Truell, 2012; Nikku, 2012).

## **1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The effects of global market forces, poorly structured economic systems, the neoliberal agenda, and dearth in social responsibilities across the world appear to have contributed to the deterioration of people's well-being, as well as a widening of inequality and poverty (Truell, 2012). Based on the above realities of globalisation, as well as the neoliberal commodifying and destroying of social work identity, it is important that frontline social workers' perceptions be considered when addressing such challenges (Engelbrecht, 2015:318). This is further encouraged by the ability to respond to globalised challenges through an understanding of how these forces play out in local cultural and economic circumstances toward addressing local needs. Here, the recommendations of Hall (1990:9) regarding the utilisation of local and indigenous

knowledge as a means to influence social work in local contexts, can be understood as necessary toward the local actionalisation of the Global Agenda.

Additionally, evidence suggests that it may be challenging for social work practitioners to gain an in-depth understanding of the links between the global trends and the local realities in influencing social work practices. The existence of this gap requires engagement with frontline social workers in order to allow them to share their experiences in the understanding of what international social work has to do with social work locally (Jones & Truell, 2012:455). Hence, this requires a wider contextual and combined understanding of frontline social workers' contributions towards the promotion of the Global Agenda in practice in order to fit their local settings (Jones & Truell, 2012; Ornellas, Spolander & Engelbrecht, 2018). The development of such a frontline understanding will assist in identifying how the Global Agenda is relevant in local settings in order to bring about global change that will affect local changes (Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development, 2014). Toward this end, Altunay (2016) recommends a strong consideration of the frontline social workers' contributions. Therefore, the absence of more evident literature in South Africa in the context of frontline social workers perceptions designates the need for this study.

From the above discussion, it can be asserted that there is a need to scrutinise the perceptions of the frontline social workers in relation to the accomplishment of the Global Agenda at various levels and within different contexts (Truell, 2012). Even though there are several studies in literature that focus on the Global Agenda, none of these studies have focused on the specific context of frontline social workers' perceptions in South Africa. In Sweden, Altunay (2016) conducted a study on the perceptions of frontline social workers in Gothenburg, where a recommendation for further research on the operationalisation of the Global Agenda was suggested. In North America, a study conducted on the Global Agenda reiterated the importance of the Agenda's four pillars and encouraged the developmental efforts shaped around achieving economic growth. Additionally, the study recommends policies and interventions that will assist in the building of social cohesion, human development and addressing of inequality (Taillon, 2013). In South Africa, Ranninga and Zelnick (2014) conducted a study on the four pillars of the Global Agenda in the context of social work students' perceptions and found that global challenges seem to relate to the Global Agenda pillars. Furthermore, the mentioned authors argued that integrating the Global

Agenda in the teaching curriculum would have an international, national and local influence on the promotion of socially just societies. However, exploring the Global Agenda and its importance through the perceptions and experiences of frontline social workers in South Africa remains a gap that this study aimed to address.

### **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION**

#### **1.3.1 Main Question**

The main research question that the study aimed to answer is the following:

- What are the perceptions of frontline social workers on their contributions towards the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development?

#### ***Sub-research questions***

The study seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of frontline social workers through scrutinising the following sub-questions on a micro, mezzo and macro level:

- How do frontline social workers contribute towards the promotion of social and economic equalities?
- How are frontline social workers ensuring that they promote dignity and worth of peoples?
- How do frontline social workers work towards environmental and community sustainability?
- How are frontline social workers influencing the strengthening and recognition of the importance of human relations?

### **1.4 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES**

The goal of this study was to develop an understanding of the perceptions of frontline social workers on their contributions towards the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. The study aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- To analyse the context of social work services in South Africa within the ecological systems perspective based on the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare 2016;
- To present an overview of the four pillars of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development;
- To explore the frontline social worker's perceptions of their contributions towards the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development;
- To draw conclusions and present recommendations to social workers in South Africa on the contributions of frontline social workers concerning the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development at micro, mezzo and macro levels.

## **1.5 THEORETICAL POINTS OF DEPARTURE**

Fouche and De Vos (2011) have indicated that engaging in a literature study assists in enriching the researcher with an in-depth understanding of the identified research problem. Such an understanding may allow for, and/or contribute to, the identification of the gaps associated with the study. The study utilised the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development, as well as the ecological systems perspective as theoretical points of departure. Tasse (2014:283) mentioned that the formation of the Global Agenda was to create space for debate within the social work profession. Therefore, the four pillars of the Global Agenda's link to the micro, mezzo and macro levels (ecological systems perspective) were the core theoretical undergirding ethos of this study.

The ecological systems perspective, as a point of departure, provides the opportunity to investigate the relationship between the person-in-environment and the proposed Global Agenda's four pillars (Kondrat, 2013). This relationship was critically reviewed within the context of the social work profession. This further included the reflection on several laws and policies that influence social welfare and social work within the South African context. Therefore, the linkages between the above-selected school of thought (the ecological systems perspective), several key South African policies (such as the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare, 1997) and the four pillars of the Global Agenda, were explored. The researcher presented some arguments that were related

to the Global Agenda's pillars as well as the frontline social worker's perceptions on their contributions at micro, mezzo and macro levels.

## **1.6 CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS**

Below, the researcher offers brief definitions of key concepts used throughout the study, in terms of the Global Agenda for Social Work, social work itself, and frontline social workers.

### ***1.6.1 The Global Agenda for Social Work***

According to Tasse (2014), the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development is an initiative that seeks to encourage the working together of professionals and organisations of social work. The main purpose of the Global Agenda is to promote global collectiveness in consideration of societal issues. In addition, Pawar and Weil (2016) identify the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development as an initiative intended to assist in addressing the major global social problems in order to strengthen social work as a profession in promotion of social well-being and sustainable communities at all levels.

### ***1.6.2 Social Work***

The current or revised definition of global social work will inform the conceptualisation of social work for this study. The definition reads as follows:

“Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance well-being” (IFSW and IASSW, 2014).



### **1.6.3 Frontline Social Workers**

The concept of frontline social workers refers to qualified social workers who have direct contact with or impact on client systems (micro, mezzo and macro). This involves those social workers who are directly involved with clients and always engage in direct interactions, dealing directly with people (Altunay, 2016).

## **1.7 METHODOLOGY**

### **1.7.1 Research approach**

This study focused on the perceptions of frontline social workers on their contributions towards the Global Agenda. Therefore, the study undertook a qualitative research approach. This has provided the basis for exploring qualitative data leading to an in-depth understanding of the participants' perceptions, opinions and point of views about the research question (Hemme, Morais, Bowers & Todd, 2017). Hoebera and Shaw (2017) support the use of the qualitative research approach for such exploration as a means of facilitating an in-depth understanding, which allows the researcher to explore the assembled data through explaining and describing it in relation to the participants' opinions (Leedy & Ormord, 2005). Hence, the researcher was more interest of the qualitatively understanding of actual phenomenon thus, perceived this approach as being the most appropriate for this study.

### **1.7.2 Research design**

Considering the fact that the study was qualitative in nature, exploratory and descriptive research were utilised in the research design. According to Fouche and De Vos (2011), an exploratory research aims to offer an initial analysis of a particular phenomenon. Exploratory research thus allowed for the opportunity to engage and share knowledge and opinions with those who were practically or directly involved in the process. Fouche (2011) further encourages the use of the descriptive research approach as its focuses on the *how* and *why*, paying attention to the situation, social setting or relationship measures. Furthermore, descriptive research design allow the ability to examine a phenomenon, gaining a deeper understanding (Fouche & De Vos, 2011).



### **1.7.3 Sampling**

The sample is defined as a smaller portion of the total set of objects, events or persons, which together comprise the subject of a study (Strydom, 2004). This study used non-probability sampling, in particular, a snowball sampling design. A snowball sampling design involves approaching a single case that is involved in the phenomenon to be investigated, in order to gain information on other similar cases, contexts and/or groups (Strydom, 2011). Grinnell and Unrau (2008) add that in snowball sampling, the first participant refers the researcher to another similar case. Equally, Strydom (2011) argues that snowball sampling will assist in the identification of more participants that exhibit or are experiencing the phenomenon being investigated, thereby directing the researcher to other suitable participants for the study sample. Towards the selection of the first participant for the study, the researcher complemented the snowball sampling with the technique of probability sampling.

The study population included any qualified social workers in the Western Cape Province in South Africa. The sample size of the study was 20 qualified frontline social workers from any social work institution/organisation practising for a period of a year or more. To ensure securing of meetings with suggested possible participants of the study, the researcher sent an email requesting the possible participant(s) to take part in the study in his/her professional capacity. Therefore, consent forms to the proposed participants were sent with a request to meet the participants within their own time schedules, so as to ensure that the study did not interfere with their working times in their various institutions of employment. Furthermore, participants participated within their own professional capacity and did not represent the institution they work for.

The criteria for inclusion in the sample for the study were as follow:

Participants should be:

1. Frontline social workers practising at any institution/organisation in their professional capacity;
2. Currently working or having worked as frontline social workers for a period of a year and above.

3. The ability to speak and communicate in the English language during the research process.

#### **1.7.4 Instrument for data collection**

McLeod (2001:137) describes data collection in qualitative research as the assembling of an array of information resulting from the interactions between the participant(s) and the researcher. This researcher made use of the semi-structured interview as the primary data collection instrument. Semi-structured interviews refer to those interviews organised around particular areas of interest whilst still promoting in-depth and flexible exploration of the topic. Therefore, the study utilised an in-depth interview. Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011) define an in-depth interview as a one-to-one method of detailed data collection that involves an interviewer and an interviewee discussing specific topics in-depth. This enabled the researcher to engage with the participants and understand the context within which the participants practice and interact. The utilisation of the suggested instrument was useful in the understanding of the frontline social worker's perceptions as participants (Annexure 1).

#### **1.7.5 Data analysis**

Data analysis refers to the procedure of conveying order, structure and meaning to the information accumulated in the empirical research process (Schurink, Fouche & De Vos, 2004:333). The process of qualitative data analysis can be expressed as the search for general statements about the relationships between various categories of data. To support an effective means of data analysis and interpretation, Schurink, Fouche and De Vos (2011) encourage the ability to plan effectively, and to logically examine the data. Thus, within the data collection process, the researcher planned for the recording of the data, which was then followed by data collection, and the process of preliminary analysis. Engaging in the above-mentioned processes enabled the researcher to effectively arrange the data for presentation. Collins and Hussey (2009) added on the significance of planning as the authors suggested for following of the following steps that the researcher utilised during the data collection process. Firstly, the researcher converted the information collected into a written record. This consisted of transcribing the recorded semi-structured and in-depth interviews. The second step

involved a coding process. Here, similar trends within the data were detected, either as words or as phrases. The researcher then explained the importance of such identified patterns in the qualitative data records. The third step focussed on categorising the coded patterns into smaller categories. Here, themes and sub-themes emerged, resulting in further classification. The fourth step paid attention to generating summaries and putting thoughts on paper. The last step focussed on generalisations that were constructed from the findings and comparisons with literature. This resulted in conclusions and recommendations being drawn from the discoveries.

## **1.8 ETHICAL CLEARANCE**

The study received ethical clearance from the Social Work Departmental Ethical Screening Committee (DESC) and the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of Stellenbosch University. The study was categorised as low risk, as it aimed at gaining an understanding of the perceptions of the frontline social workers on their contributions to the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. Therefore, the participants in the proposed research consisted of 20 qualified frontline social workers working in various organisations, participating in their professional capacity. Considering the importance of confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent, the researcher ensured that the participants gave informed consent. In addition, the information gathered was kept in a safe, on a security coded hard drive and in a locked locker (Annexure 2).

## **1.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

De Vos et al. (2011) identified the researcher ability to recognise the limitations of the study as imperative and that it is important to list them down. Limitations that were reflected on include the following:

- In this study, frontline social workers seemed to be of opinion that their knowledge of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development were limited. The study had only 17 frontline social workers as participants. This meant that the study was limited to the experiences and contribution of frontline social workers on the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. Furthermore, the study is

thus limited to a limited number of 17 frontline social workers – no generalisations or extrapolations of the study can be made to the universal cohort of frontline social workers in South Africa.

- The study mostly relied on other studies done in other continents, as none have been done in Africa.
- The research focussed on the Western Cape Province of South Africa hence, it cannot be generalised to other provinces of South Africa or in neighbouring countries. In addition, having all participants being from various non-governmental organisations might also be presented as a limitation, as no frontline social workers working in governmental structures were included. This might have contributed to different perceptions being shared by the participants.

## 1.10 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The research study was laid out as follows:

- **Chapter 1** – Research Introduction;  
This chapter presents the rationale; problem statement; research questions; and goals and objectives. It also presents various concepts and definitions; outline of the ethical process followed in the study is presented. Lastly, limitations of study is presented.
- **Chapter 2** – First Objective – analysis of South African social work services within the ecological systems perspective based on the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare 2016.  
This chapter presents the ecological systems perspective and social welfare services within a South African context. The chapter provide an analysis of South African services based on the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare 2016.
- **Chapter 3** - Second Objective – Presentation of an overview of the four pillars of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development.  
This chapter provides an overview of the four pillars of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development.
- **Chapter 4** – Third Objective – exploration of frontline social workers' perceptions on their contributions towards the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development.

This chapter presents the findings of the study on the perceptions of frontline social workers on their contribution to the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. The findings are presented in to four pillars of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development.

- **Chapter 5** – Fourth Objective – drawing of conclusions and presentation of recommendations to social workers in South Africa on contributions of frontline social workers concerning the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development on micro, mezzo and macro levels.

This chapter presents conclusions and recommendations drawn from the study on the contributions of frontline social workers to the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development.

## **1.11 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Given the presented problem statement and the motivation for this study, the role of social workers in relation to the pillars of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development should be investigated. Therefore, the following chapters will conceptualise the role of frontline social workers within an ecological systems perspective towards the promotion of the Global Agenda.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE AND SOCIAL WORK SERVICES WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

One of the aims of this study is to provide an analysis of the importance of employing the ecological systems perspective in social work. Therefore, this chapter covers a comprehensive presentation of the ecological systems perspective as a theoretical framework for the study. Firstly, a clear background and description of the ecological systems perspective is presented with a link to the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. Secondly, social welfare services in a South African context are presented through the lens of the ecological systems perspective. Thirdly, a more in-depth understanding of the South African social welfare services supported by the relevant policy document (Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare, 2016) will be outlined. Lastly, a conclusion of the chapter is provided.

#### **2.2 ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE**

The focus of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding on the perceptions of frontline social workers on their contributions towards the four pillars of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. The actualities of frontline social workers' experiences of their day-to-day encounters working with various individuals, groups and communities and systems and how they perceive the relevance of the Global Agenda in their specific local contexts at various levels, are the main focus of the study. However, it is essential to look at frontline social workers' experience through the lens of an ecological systems perspective as a theoretical practice framework. The next discussion focuses on the following: a brief history of the ecological systems perspective as a school of thought and the purpose thereof as a scientific theory. It is followed by a discussion of the main concepts of the ecological system perspective, which includes; person-in-environment, physical and social environment, habitat and niche, open and closed systems, coping, human relatedness and power as well as the various systems within the ecological systems perspective.

### ***2.2.1 Brief history of the ecological systems perspective***

According to Piccus and Minahan (1973:8), who are primary authors on the ecological systems perspective in social work, every helping profession needs its own frame of reference to view the situations it is presented with. A viewpoint suggests an understanding of the development of the ecological systems perspective as being important for this study. It is important to gain an insight on how this specific perspective has progressed in support of social work research. The ecological systems perspective has gradually received more attention in social work, in terms of trying to understand individuals and their environment. The need to identify the strong connections between the individual and his/her surrounding can therefore also be traced back to the work done by Mary Richmond on the realisation of the important role the environment plays in influencing social functioning (Pardeck, 1988). Moreover, in the early 1970's, Bronfenbrenner building on Lewin and Barker's ideas, came to realise that developmental psychology mostly cared for development in an unnatural setting. This resulted in Bronfenbrenner (1990) considering people's experiences as a combination of procedures, persons, setting and time features. Therefore, to have a thorough understanding of the ecological systems perspective, it is vital to understand the importance of a scientific theory.

### ***2.2.2 The purpose of a scientific theory***

Rogers (2018) describes a scientific theory as the justification of some aspects of the natural world that can be empirically tested. In doing this, scientists pay attention to some careful observations, regularities and theories. The purpose of a theory is to assist with an in-depth appreciation of the world, as well as gaining and attaining reliable knowledge (De Vos & Strydom, 2011). Dale, Smith, Norlin and Chess (2006) stated that all theories start with a set of assumptions about humans and the world in which they live. For this study, the ecological systems perspective as a school of thought will be utilised. This standpoint will create the chance to see how frontline social workers contribute towards the four pillars of the Global Agenda in a South

African context in relation to the various settings, different systems, diversity issues and the local, regional and national policies. An understanding of the frontline social workers' perceptions requires a holistic assessment. This perspective will provide an in-depth understanding of frontline social workers' integrated approach to social work practice. Therefore, the main concepts of the ecological systems perspective are discussed below.

### ***2.2.3 Concepts of the ecological systems perspective***

This section presents the different concepts of the ecological systems perspective.

#### ***2.2.3.1 Person-in-environment***

According to the seminal work of Germain and Gitterman (1996:6), the concept of environment refers to both the physical and social settings. These physical and social environments are influenced by way of understanding, norms, principles and cultural beliefs that control the way individuals use and respond to their environment. The interactions amongst the person and his/her surroundings have been associated with positive, negative or neutral relationships. Therefore, the term 'person-in-environment' has been described as referring to the actual fit between an individual's or a collective group's needs, rights, goals and capacities and the qualities and operations of the physical and social environments within particular cultural and historical contexts (Encyclopaedia of Social Work, 1995:17). On the other hand, the Council for Social Work Education (2004) also claims that the person-in-environment in social work practice indicate the significance of a person and his/her behaviour in relation to his/her environment where the person lives and acts.

Nikku and Pulla (2012) perceived the ability of social workers to understand an individual in consideration to his/her setting as influential for interventions and assessments that encourage their positive functioning in relation to contextual (indigenous) social work to meet both local and global needs. A study by Sims, Chenu and Williams (2014) also support a similar perspective when suggesting that social workers possess specialised knowledge. This knowledge assists in creating a mutual desire for social justice and enhance a collective action as people become aware that



their problems are related to societal or global problems, which is the intention of the Global Agenda. Furthermore, Sheedy (2013) contends that the way in which social workers construct people's problems and the professional interventions they offer depend largely on their observation of how the world they live in, operates. In the event of frontline social workers having a clearer understanding of the influences between people and their specific environment, it assists with an in-depth understanding of the origin of the problem confronted and the people's lived experiences as they engage with individuals in their own setting.

### **2.2.3.2      *Physical and social environment***

From an ecological system perspective view, the aim of social work practice is to assist in developing some relations amongst persons and their complex layers of environment in order to enhance human social functioning in the context of space and time (Bronfenbrenner, 1990). Physical environment denotes the natural and built world, whilst social environment consists of a network of human interactions at different levels. The physical-social environments are further influenced by the way in which people use and respond to the environment, and this involves experiences from their own beliefs, acquired knowledge, cultural understandings and norms. Therefore, individuals are understood to be operating in a mutually beneficial process in their physical-social-cultural settings (Germain, 1979; Siporin, 1980).

Bronfenbrenner (1990) identifies the physical environment as referring to those physical devices found in the area in which a person resides, works and plays that is physical in nature. Hence, physical settings can affect an individuals' physical well-being. On the other hand, the social context involves people's demographic, socio-economic, macro-economic and political aspects. The influences of the physical-social environments impact on individuals, groups and societies at micro, meso and macro levels of the organisations (Eaton et al., 2003).

In order to gain a better understanding of the human beings and their social environment, Figure 2.1 provides a clear picture of how an individual interacts with the different levels of an organisation in a social context. The levels seemed to be interacting with each other and with other levels in the ecological system. This can be

used to enhance an in-depth understanding of the interactions between people and the various organisational levels they function in in their social environment.

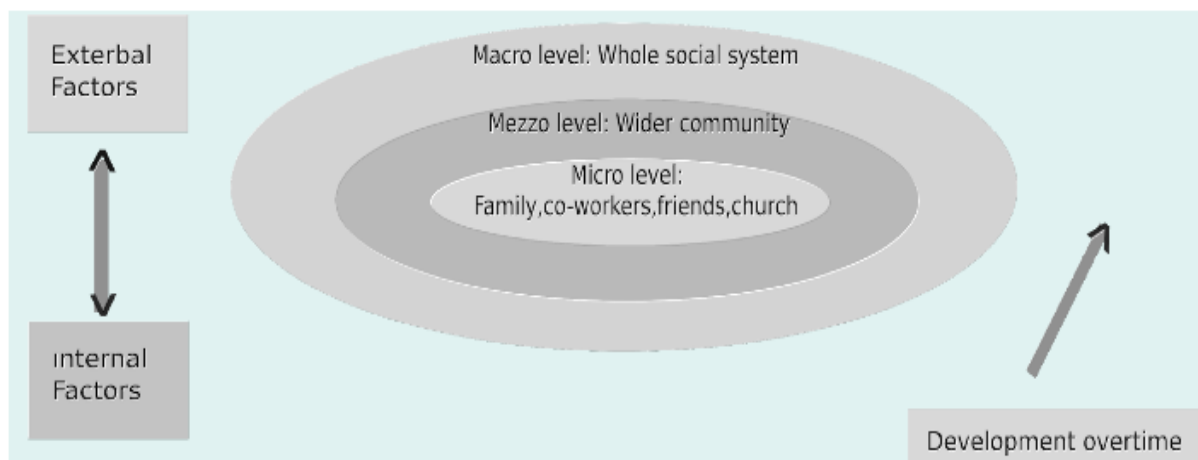


Figure 2.1: Interaction of individuals with the different levels in social context

(adapted from Donald et al., 2002).

Figure 2.1 assists in providing a clear understanding of how social workers interact with individuals at various levels in their social environment. As frontline social workers engage in the identified levels, their interaction at each specific level can be related to the setting and intervention process, whilst influenced by various internal and external factors. This has been supported by Green (2012) who shared the understanding that social work practice can be categorised depending on the purpose and organisational context of practice. For example, at a micro level, the practice work will involve engaging with family, co-workers, friends and church. The frontline social workers working at this specific level might be perceived as related to fieldwork. The mezzo level involves interactions of social workers with the wider community. This might be connected to managerial social work practices. At a macro level, frontline social workers focus on helping people by intervening in large systems. Examples include lobbying for amendments to laws, organising a state-wide activist group or advocating for a large-scale social policy change.

### 2.2.3.3 *Habitat and niche*

The habitat and niche of an individual play a crucial role in influencing how her/his needs, rights and aspirations are met. Germain and Gitterman (1996:20) referred to habitat as the physical and social settings, symbolising places of dwellings,

transportation, workplaces, religious structures, social agencies and amenities such as libraries, parks and museums. If these habitats are not supportive to individuals' growth, health and social functioning, they are likely to lead to experiences of helplessness, isolation and disorientation. The social status of a person in his/her social environment has been identified as the niche. According to the Encyclopaedia of Social work (1995:818), many communities have oppressive, marginalised, stigmatised and destructive niches that do not support human rights, needs and aspirations. Germain and Gitterman (1996) add that community niches that interfere with individuals' social functioning, are critical environmental elements in social work. There can be no doubt that the habitats and niches of many vulnerable people do not contribute to positive person/environment relationships. Therefore, these are serious elements that frontline social workers need to address by supporting the four pillars of the Global Agenda at various levels in their everyday practice. For example, in the context of this study, the frontline social workers' habitats might be seen as the organisation and other structures that have an influence in relation to the various settings within which they operate. Niche will refer to the various roles (e.g. advocate, community developer, teacher and broker) they play in promoting the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development.

#### **2.2.3.4      *Open and closed systems***

Unlike other professionals, social work requires the ability to reflect on whether a system is open or closed, in order to gain insight on how it influences people and their environment together with various other systems that are involved. Bertalanffy (1969:38), who is regarded as the primary author on this subject matter, describes systems as sets of elements standing in interrelation. The author argued that open systems are those systems that have constant interaction with their environment, whilst closed systems are those systems that are isolated from their environment. Therefore, systems can be classified as open or closed in reference to how they interact with the outside environment (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2002:30).

Open systems are able to interact with the environment and exchange materials, energies or information as they are characterised by the continuous presence of activities. As the parts of the systems act purposefully, the structures are easily

adjusted in order to ensure that the goals are accomplished. The openness of systems allows for the efficient input and output of energies within the environment, whilst recognising some acknowledgeable boundaries (Dale et al., 2006; Preston-Shoot & Agass, 1990). Hence, openness is important as it promotes systems growth. As the interaction amongst systems becomes less, experiences of disequilibrium faced become more pronounced. In relation to this study, frontline social workers interacting more with the various systems as they get involved in their work promotes the exchange of energies, efforts and resources with the environment. Therefore, continuous interactions will support the adjustments that have to occur in order to achieve the intended goals, as they contribute towards the four pillars.

Closed systems can be identified by their lack of sufficient inputs, which contributes to some rigid and unchanging patterns. There is a limited exchange in terms of energy and resources with other systems and the environment. As a result, a completely closed system will experience some limited interactions and exchanges with the environment, which influences negatively on other systems as well as the environment (Chetkow-Yanoov, 1997). Frontline social workers should be able to question and analyse the systems (open/closed) that produce and maintain injustice, discrimination and oppression (Sheedy, 2013). In the context of the need to support for systems that promote positive interactions, Bell and Hafford-Letchfield (2015) aver that social workers can promote open systems by engaging in situations and analyse by utilising their specialised knowledge. Frontline social workers might engage in a transformative critical action by employing a set of principles for a practice based on questioning and analysing systems from a position of understanding which systems support or deprives people (Sheedy, 2013).

Based on this study, open systems will promote growth as within social work, open systems are considered to be more functional in nature, interacting with the environment and thereby allowing continual growth and development. Hence, closed systems are believed to be dysfunctional. With open systems perceived as goal orientated, this will allow frontline social workers' engagement with the systems to promote functioning, as positive feedback loops will be kept open, encouraging communication and system growth (Dale et al., 2006). This has been supported by Germain(1979) who stated that positive feedback facilitates change in a system as well as accelerating the intervention process.

### **2.2.3.5      *Coping, human relatedness and power***

The concepts of coping, human relatedness and power are also considered important notions within the ecological systems perspective. It is significant to understand that these three concepts occur over time and they can be present for a lifetime (Germain & Gitterman, 1996). These concepts are briefly discussed below.

- **Coping**

Germain and Gitterman (1996:14) defines coping as the behavioural and cognitive measures to change some aspect of oneself, the environment, the exchanges between them, or all three in order to manage negative feelings aroused. This implies that if unproductive coping is experienced, emotional and physiological stresses are more likely to build up, which could negatively affect physical, social and emotional functioning. Hence, coping have been referred to as the ability to make exceptional adaptations in the course of events that are stressful. As a result, proper coping measures are required that will enable the handling of the demands posed by life stressors (Germain, 1991:21; The Encyclopaedia of Social Work, 1995:817). In the view of the ecological systems perspective, the aim of social work practice is to promote the development of problem solving skills. This will assist with the regulation of negative feelings, promoting coping (Germain, 1979). Therefore, frontline social workers' interventions are focussed on giving social support required to ensure individuals are able to cope, supported by the available resources. It is relevant for this study, as the ability to cope is observed in social work as an expression of positive person/environment relationships (Germain, 1991).

- **Human relatedness**

Human relatedness refers to the ability of an individual to sustain some healthy relationships, and is one of the aspects that indicate the existing of strong ties between the fit of the person and his/her environment. Relatedness can be associated with the individual's capabilities to form friendships and other social affiliations (Germain & Gitterman, 1996). The need for closeness with people who mainly influences one's life is paramount, as lack of support networks might lead to experiences of isolation and loneliness. Germain and Gitterman (1996:15) recommended the importance of strong

attachments, as it promotes a sense of belonging as well as the creation of strong human relationships. This is significant for this study, as it links to the Global Agenda pillar focussed on the strengthening of human relations.

- Power

Given the fact that power resembles dominance, it clearly suggests that having one system being more dominant than the other is an indication of the negative fit of systems within the environment. Hence, this might negatively influence the exchange of energies and resources amongst the individuals and their own environment. The result of dominance may affect various societies/groups across the system levels. According to Germain (1991:24), withholding of power by dominant groups leads to oppression of vulnerable groups. Furthermore, this leads to social pollution such as poverty, unemployment, housing shortages, unsatisfactory education and health care systems. The view was further supported by Germain and Gittermain (1996), who perceived the failure to negotiate for power equality as resulting in limiting growth-promotion. For example, vulnerable individuals may present an experience of powerlessness, which might contribute to more disruptive life stressors. Therefore, frontline social workers' interventions should not be overlooked, as the need to focus on strategies that promote effective coping mechanisms are crucial to this specific study.

#### ***2.2.4 Systems within the ecological perspective***

According to Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2002:44), the ecological systems perspective assists in understanding how individuals and groups are interdependent, interact and link with various dynamics at different levels of organisation in the social environment. Having social work being characterised by both system stabilising and system de-stabilising functions, frontline social workers' experience within the various systems are aimed to contribute to the vulnerable through advocacy, social action and policy engagement. Hence, frontline social workers' interventions promote the maintaining of peaceful and harmonious relationships and social stability as social workers engage with people in their own environments. These levels of social context (micro, mezzo and macro) are perceived as being nested together and are being discussed in depth in the following section.

## BRONFENBRENNER'S STRUCTURE OF ENVIRONMENT

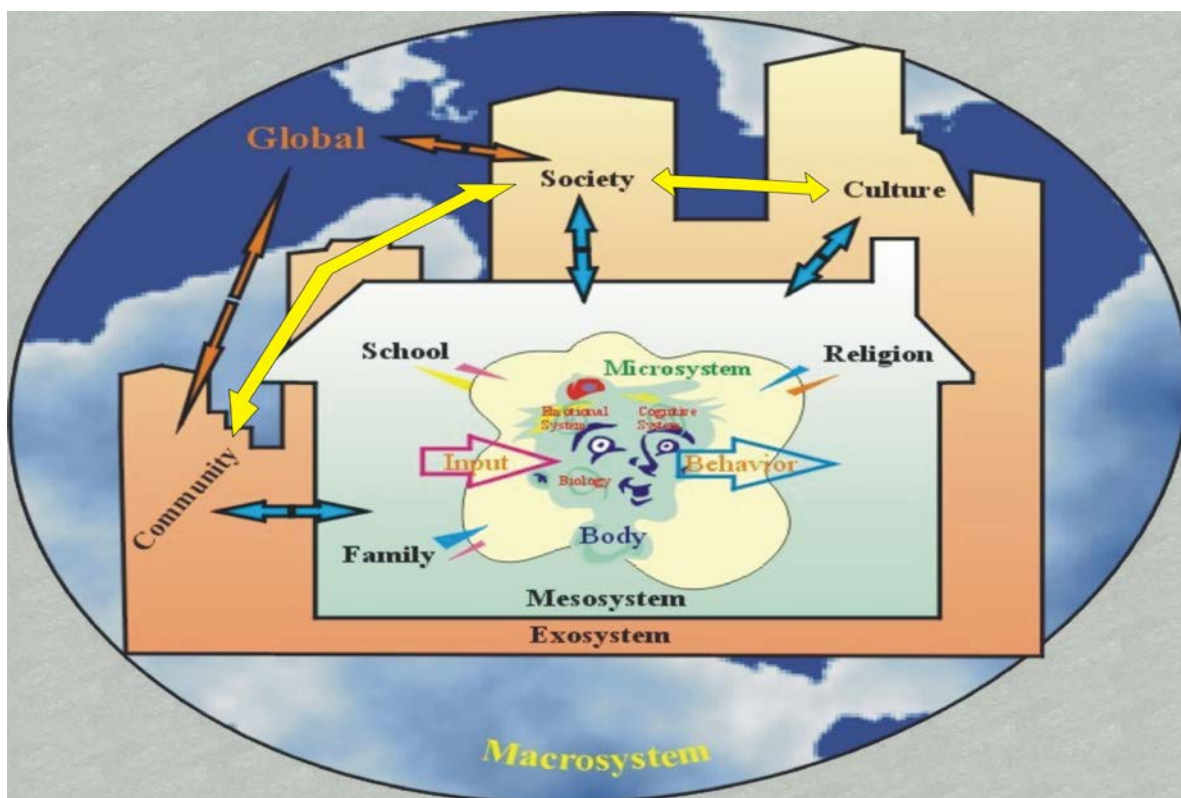


Figure 2.2: Micro, mezzo and macro levels

(Bronfenbrenner, 1990)

### 2.2.4.1 *Micro system*

The micro system is the most direct system and smallest systems in which the person interacts on a face-to-face basis. This includes interactions with family, the working environment and school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:7; Wait, Meyer & Loxton, 2005:156). In reference to the Global Agenda, the most substantial connections in this system will be the small systems involved between the frontline social workers' individuals and groups as they interact. Donald et al. (2002) identified the close systems contact that occur at the micro as important. Ott, Quinn and Thompson (2004:3) shared similar perceptions and stated that interactions at micro-level include the individuals' knowledge, attitudes, values, self-concept, self-esteem and skills-behaviour.



#### **2.2.4.2      *Mezzo system***

Nash, Munford and O' Donoghue (2005) and Bronfenbrenner (1979) identified this level as being more influenced by sets of links among the micro systems. This level is classified as the organisational level (Bernstein & Gray, 1997). Hence, if there are strong connections between the micro systems, the more encouraging it will be for the mezzo systems. For example, the constant involvement of frontline social workers with the individuals at (micro) and organisational (mezzo) levels, is more likely to contribute to the Global Agenda's pillars at different levels. Ott et al. (2004:3) perceived the existence of a solid relationship amongst systems as fundamental, as it allows for accessing social support and networking. In support, Donald et al. (2002) also perceived having access to social supports and networks as promoting the modification of an individual's feelings of insecurity, assisting with the change of behaviour. Therefore, frontline social workers' engagement at this level will contribute to strengthening the social support and network systems.

#### **2.2.4.3      *Macro system***

The macro system is the broadest level of the environment. It is the largest level of analysis that includes large societal factors. At this level, social workers are concerned with the interrelationship between social factors such as culture, social policies and socio-economic conditions (Bernstein & Gray, 1997; Donald et al., 2002; Scileppi, Teed & Torres, 2000). Social work practice is influenced by various factors in the macro system. For example, the political and economic situation might affect policy making at this level. Therefore, it requires of frontline social workers to gain a better understanding of the population involved, the relevant problems and the society where change will be required, as well as participating in policy assembling (Netting, Kettner & McMurtry, 2004).

Even though some authors refer to the exo-system and chrono-system, the abovementioned three systems are the most imperative systems. According to Chetkow-Yanoov (1997), the exo-system consists of the links amongst the micro and meso systems. The exo-system is characterised by systems like medical, educational



and recreational resources. The chrono-system refers to all systems and their influence on each other. This clearly explains that all societal issues are unsurprisingly interwoven. Hence, frontline social workers engage with macro systems like community resources, neighbourhood organisations, social and health services as well as government structures as they assist in connecting the individuals to the whole social system, consisting of various micro systems that are evidently interconnected. Given the South African context, the social assistance system of grants is categorised as one of the important systems in the welfare sector (Lombard, 2008). Hence, the above author acknowledged frontline social workers' roles as social change agents, as they engage with various systems working with the highly sophisticated modern world as well as the socially excluded.

## **2.3 SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE**

The discussion below will provide a reflection on social welfare and social work services in South Africa, based on the adoption of the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare (2016). The discussion assists with providing a clear understanding of the intentions of this specific policy document in relation to South African welfare services. In an attempt to discuss social welfare services in South Africa, firstly; the South African social welfare services are discussed together with social work services in relation to the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare (2016). Secondly, social services operating in South Africa are presented through an ecological systems perspective. Lastly, sectors of social work services in South Africa will be presented, as well as the social welfare and social work recipients.

### ***2.3.1 South African social welfare and social work services and the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997)***

According to Lombard (2008), the current approach to social welfare services in South Africa has evolved from the country's unique history of inequality and human rights violations due to colonialism and apartheid. These events and wider forces embedded in the history of South Africa as a country, seemed to have shaped the introduction of the current social welfare services. According to Lombard (2008), new social welfare

thinking was introduced with notions of social transformation, resulting in changes in laws. Based on the changes in laws, South Africa adopted a social development approach that resulted in the development of a social welfare policy, which is the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997).

The Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare (2016) outlines the broad policy guiding principles for social welfare services and social work. The introduction of this policy document has had a profound effect on social welfare and social work services in South Africa. According to Gray and Lombard (2008), social welfare services became more popular in South Africa with social work becoming a well-known role player in the provision of organised social welfare services, both in the governmental (primary sector) and non-governmental sectors. As a result, according to (DSD, Comprehensive Report on the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare, 2016) the crucial role social work played in relation to provision of social welfare services legitimised the profession as the chief provider of social welfare services in South African Context.

With social justice seen as having been seriously eroded in South Africa under the apartheid-era, the Comprehensive Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare 2016 link the directive of the Department of Social Development and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa to take up the role for a just society. The Department of Social Development is a government department responsible for providing social development, protection and welfare social services to the vulnerable (DSD, Comprehensive Report on the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare, 2016). This means that the provision of social development services is not narrowly seen a matter of charity, but as giving effect to the government's constitutional obligation to human rights. The adoption of the White Paper as a policy document, introduction of the Department of Social Development and identification of the social sector as a whole enabled the expansion of social assistance programmes in South Africa (DSD, Comprehensive Report on the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare, 2016).

The Comprehensive Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare (2016) proposed that clear definitions of the roles and responsibilities of social workers and other categories of social service professionals be developed. According to the DSD and SACSSP (2008), the social service professionals comprise of social workers, social

auxiliary workers, child and youth care workers, community development practitioners, youth workers and probation officers. While social work is unique in some ways, it is fully expected to overlap with the other social service professionals in terms of roles and functions performed. Hence, in the South African context, social services are exercised in various settings. These consist of a range of departments including the offices of premiers, child welfare, family and marriage societies, hospitals, mental health settings, disability, the aged, early childhood development, youth services, correctional services, work with offenders outside of prison, work with persons with epilepsy, social work in schools and in cooperate settings (SACSSP, Final Draft, 2008).

In order to promote continuous growth in terms of social welfare and social work services in South Africa, social workers engage with vulnerable people to give support to ensure they regain control of their lives (Sims et al., 2014). Moreover, as social workers often work with people who are at high risk, social work practice is focused beyond just supporting individuals. Frontline social workers go as far as ensuring that they do whatever they can to promote the overall welfare and improvement of the society through professional interventions they offer to vulnerable people by engaging in various programmes (Sims et al., 2014; Sheedy, 2013). According to DSD Strategic Plan, 2013:3; DSD, 2010:47) social welfare services include social welfare, community development and social security programs. These programs vary from prevention, early intervention, statutory interventions as well as aftercare interventions to address risk factors in order to facilitate growth, stability as well as well-functioning of families and societies. To emphasise the importance of social welfare services in South Africa, the social developmental welfare policy was developed for all social service professionals.

In accordance with the intentions expressed in the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare (2016), all social welfare service providers, including government, non-government organisations (NGOs) and private providers are implementing the White Paper should be assessed. This is aimed at identifying the associated issues, challenges and gaps in service delivery as well as social workers' participation. Social services being managed from district, provincial and national levels in South Africa, and the assessment of its implementation assisted with determining the lessons of experience for the ongoing social development transformation in the South African context.

Presently, the review of the White Paper (2016) report contains key observations and proposals from the beneficiaries of social services and the broader voice of the sector represented by non-governmental organisations, institutions of higher learning that produce social service professionals as well as social service professionals themselves. It is indicated in the review report that many of the services delivered previously continue to be delivered. However, a range of new additional services and programmes has been developed and are currently supplied. These include, for example, active ageing, drop-in centres, home and community-based care services, stimulation centres, diversion, shelters and prevention and early intervention programmes. Provinces continue to fund several new fields such as youth development, women development, victim empowerment and HIV and AIDS (Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare, 2016).

Patel (2012) identifies the engagement of social workers with the multiple levels as important to the provision of social services. In doing so, they are bridging the divide between the micro and macro practice; involving the poor and the vulnerable in participation and developing partnerships (Lombard, 2008:166). As a result, the involvement of frontline social workers assists with giving recommendations for changes to legislation, policies and programmes in line with the South African government's National Development Plan (Vision 2030) (Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare, 2016:22).

### ***2.3.2 Social work services in South Africa and the ecological systems perspective***

South African social work services are delivered at different levels namely; micro, mezzo and macro levels. At these levels, social workers provide social welfare services to the needy, but their primary targets are the vulnerable groups in the community which include children, youth, women, older persons and people with disabilities (Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare, 2016). Within a micro level, social services are provided to individuals. The common services include helping individuals to find appropriate housing, health care and individual counselling as well as family

therapy services. At this first level, social workers consider the importance of human relations as they work towards a social developmental approach (Patel, 2012).

On a mezzo or organisational level, social work services are more concentrated on negotiating policy into a programme or working structure where it stresses policy implementation (Gray, 2010; Patel & Hochfeld, 2008; Patel, 2012). Within this second level, frontline social workers engage with small to medium sized groups, focussing on issues like institutional or cultural change rather than individual clients. The services on a mezzo level seek to improve small communities through initiation of programs that empower the group/community members.

On the third level, which is the macro level, social work services in South Africa are characterised by policy formation and is being influenced by the political and economic ideologies (Patel, 2012). Social work services at this specific level are aimed to involve the community's participation in systematic changes, hence promoting change in policy. Therefore, macro services address issues experienced on micro and mezzo levels, as well as social research.

In a South African context, social work services are provided in a variety of settings such as government sectors and non-governmental sectors (DSD, 2009). Through the implementation of a social development approach, attempts focus on trying to bridge the micro-macro service delivery practices. As a result, social workers move between micro, mezzo and macro levels as they offer social work services. For example, a frontline social worker can work with a family at a micro level. Social contact with organisations may be at a mezzo level in order to create and devise programs with the same family. At a macro level, social workers can get in contact with research institutions and engage in research on particular social problems encountered in practice considering the influence of the government macro policies and legislation

In this respect, the developmental social work paradigm has been perceived as promoting the enhancement and empowerment of individuals, families, groups and communities by intervening at different levels. Hence, developmental social work in South Africa has been characterised by interventions taking place on micro, mezzo and macro levels (Department of Social Development, 2009; Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare, 2016). Micro social work practice (individuals and families)

is characterised by social work practice focusing on personal interaction with individuals and families; social workers engage in therapeutic services at micro level with case work practice dominating at this level and provide counselling services as well as advising individuals of the special programs available. These programs might involve finding temporary housing, health care, counselling and mental health services amongst others (Derezotey, 2000).

Social work services at a mezzo level (groups, organisations) are exercised more through the application of the group work method. Therefore, mezzo level intervention creates changes in task groups, teams, organizations, and the network of service delivery. In other words, the locus for change is within organizations and formal groups, including their structures, goals, or functions (Derezotey, 2000). For example, a school social worker may practice mezzo social work through hosting presentations on issues such as bullying and substance abuse. Similarly, clinical social workers can provide health workshops to small groups of individuals.

Macro level (communities/societies) intervention addresses social problems in community, institutional and societal systems. The focus at this level is to work towards achieving change at community level or on a larger scale. Social workers normally engage in community work through neighbourhood organising, community planning, locality development, public education, policy development and social action (Derezotey, 2000). Examples of macro level interventions include lobbying to change a health care law or organising a state wide social policy change.

### **2.3.3 Sectors of social work services in South Africa**

Social work services are provided in different sectors in South Africa. These include governmental and non-governmental sectors. The governmental sector is recognised as the primary segment, employing a holistic approach in provision of social work services. The non-governmental sector focus on specialised services and is considered as the secondary subdivision in providing social work services in South Africa. Within the governmental sector, the Department of Social Development is the nominated division in key processes of social work services (DSD, 2013).

According to the DSD (2013), social work services in South Africa are based on a collective responsibility of and collaborative partnerships between the public sector, private sector, civil society, training institutions and research institutions. In ensuring the provision of services to meet the social needs of society, all these partners play a crucial role. In addition, some complementary services are also provided to facilitate the holistic delivery of welfare services. Notably, with the South African legislation providing for the delivery of social services, frontline social workers concentrate on interventions focused on family preservation services, therapeutic or rehabilitation services and statutory services. Among others, frontline social workers offer services that include working with individuals, groups and the community. These consist of projects or programmes that will promote the positive social functioning of people through preventative, early, statutory and aftercare interventions (Manual on Family Preservation Services, 2010; Strydom, 2010:197).

The Department of Social Development (DSD) Directorate, as part of its mandate in terms of the Non-profit Organisation (NPO) Act, has the right to ensure that the standard of government within NPOs is maintained and improved. The NPO Act seeks to create an enabling environment for NPOs and provides for them to register. Although, in terms of the NPO Act registration is “voluntary” insofar as being appropriate for public benefit organisation status is concerned, such registration is required, inter alia, for eligibility for benefits granted under the South African National Welfare Act (NWA) (No. 100 of 1978), the Lotteries Act (No 57 of 1997) and other local authority and social assistance legislation (DSD, 2009).

According to the DSD (2009:15), NPOs operate in a different way from the way profit organisations function. Operations for profit organisations are designed with the principal aim of generating profits. On the other hand, NPOs pursue some public benefit or promote social change, as profits generated by NPOs are used to advance the organisation’s objectives. As a result, South Africa’s delivery of social services depends mostly on the non-governmental sector, which have resulted in identification of various groups as the recipients. According to Lombard (2008), social workers and social service practitioners should continuously seek to understand the context in which they operate. This will enable the identification of various target groups in need of social intervention. In reference to this study, this will allow frontline social workers to gain insight of the social issues experienced in specific context at micro, mezzo and



macro levels. Furthermore, Raninga and Zelnick (2014) perceived the ability of frontline social workers to demonstrate the critical awareness of the global forces (oppression, exclusion etc.) that influence their local context in order to act as change agents as crucial to meet the end goals of social justice. Tasse (2014) supported the same view and remarked that the Global Agenda refers to social workers who perceive themselves as technically competent and as agents of transformation.

The DSD (2006) identifies the primary target groups for social work services as the poor and the vulnerable people in societies. These target groups include the children and youth, families, women, older people and the disabled. In addition, people infected with HIV and AIDS and those who have other special needs are also considered (DSD, 2006). Hence, the DSD (2008) acknowledges that significant progress has been made in development of social services in all spheres (i.e. formal and informal welfare sectors, national bodies, non-governmental organisations, faith-based organisations and community-based organisations). The figure below gives an indication of the various social service organisations in South Africa (Engelbrecht, 2015).



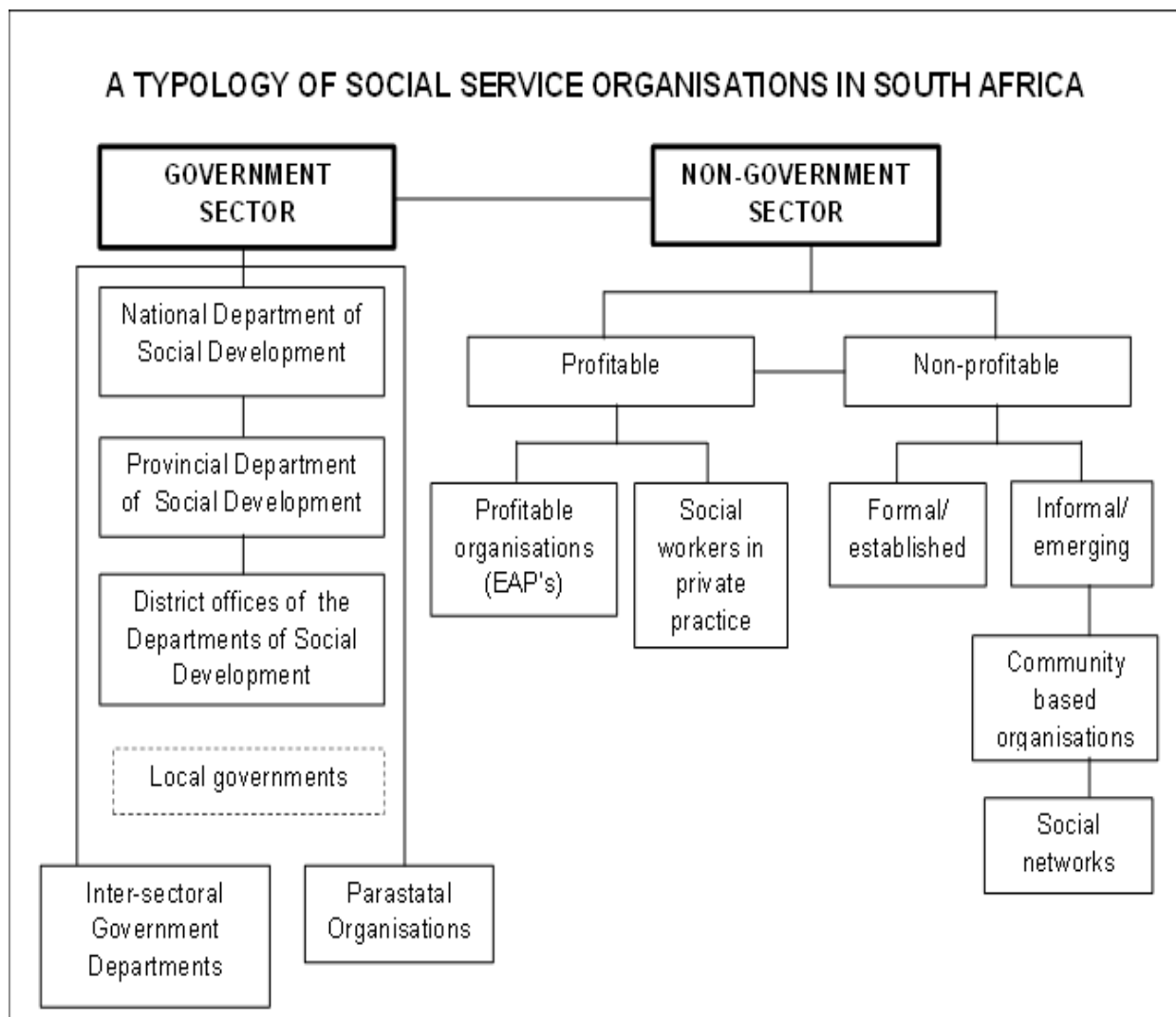


Figure 2.3: Social service organisations in South Africa

(Adopted from: Engelbrecht, 2015:12)

As indicated in the diagram above, the social service sector in South Africa consists of government and non-government sectors. Under the governmental sector falls the National Department of Social Development, providing strategic leadership. It then moves to the provincial departments and district offices, which work hand-in-hand with the local government, inter-sectoral government departments and parastatal (state owned) organisations. On the other hand, the non-government sector comprises of two categories namely, the profitable and non-profitable organisations. Formal organisations adhere to the requirements of the Department of Social Development in terms of registration, whilst informal organisations are usually not registered. Non-profitable organisations are further divided into formal and informal organisations. The community-based organisations and social networks are some of the informal organisations found in communities (Engelbrecht, 2015:12).

## 2.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an overview of the ecological systems perspective by providing an understanding of the relationship between an individual and his or her environment, referred to as the person/environment fit. The chapter described the main concepts of the ecological systems perspective to demonstrate an in-depth understanding. Furthermore, attention was paid to different levels as well as systems the frontline social workers are in contact with in their daily life experiences as they work with individuals, families, groups and the community at large. Hence, it is clear that the ecological systems perspective provides an insight into understanding the different aspects influencing on individuals and their environment.

In the next chapter, the four pillars of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development will be explored in relation to the ecological systems perspective levels. The following pillars will be discussed in detail to gain an understanding on how frontline social workers' experience contribute towards the four Global Agenda pillars.

- Promoting social and economic inequalities
- Promoting dignity and worth of the person
- Working towards environmental sustainability
- Strengthening recognition of the importance of human relationships.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE GLOBAL AGENDA FOR SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Given the fact that the focus of this study is on understanding frontline social workers' perceptions and their experiences with various individuals in different settings, the aim of this chapter is to create an understanding on the pillars of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. Firstly, an overview of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development is presented. Secondly, a clear exploration of each pillar of the Global Agenda is presented to ensure a clear understanding and interpretation. Thirdly, an in-depth argument on the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development is offered. Lastly, each pillar of the Global Agenda will be discussed from a global perception, narrowing it down to the South African context with provision of relevant practice examples in the implementation of each specific pillar.

#### **3.2 AN OVERVIEW OF THE GLOBAL AGENDA FOR SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development was jointly established by the IASSW, ICSW and IFSW (Jones & Truell, 2012). According to the newsletter by the IASSW (2010), the agenda process was initiated at the global conference in Hong Kong in June 2010. It grew out of concern that the voice of social work was not being heard by international organisations, politicians and decision makers. As a result, the joint conference was an opportunity for the IASSW, ICSW and IFSW to come together as the main representative bodies to engage in a discussion of the social problems being experienced across the globe (IASSW, 2010).

According to Lombard (2015), and Nikku and Pulla (2012), the Global Agenda was launched to serve as a common platform for discussion and as an agenda of commitments to action. The process was explicitly designed to strengthen the profile and visibility of social work, to develop new partnerships, to boost the confidence of

social workers and to enable social workers to make a more significant contribution to policy development (Jones & Truell, 2012:3). Hence, the intention is to promote global development, which has been a global goal for the past 50 years (IASSW, 2010).

The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development is focussed on promoting global development. For that reason, social work understands development as improved human well-being and views development holistically, appreciating the interconnectedness of economic, social and environmental factors at community, national and global levels (IASSW, 2010). Moreover, social work identifies that improved well-being often flows from community-based interventions and therefore supports community development initiatives. However, community level interventions must be supported by macro level improvements at national and global levels in order to confront the root causes of poverty and inequality through initiation of sustainable programs at regional and national levels (IASSW, 2010). To ensure that the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development promoted the achievement of sustainable outcomes and the identification of social workers skills, the following four pillars were identified:

- Promoting social and economic inequalities
- Promoting dignity and worth of the person
- Working towards environmental sustainability
- Strengthening recognition of the importance of human relationships.

After the introduction of the Global Agenda, the critical element was centred on ways that will promote the achievement of the four pillars stated above. Identifying these certainties, the representatives formulated key objectives related to each of the four pillars (Jones & Truell, 2012). According to Jones and Truell (2012:588), the commitments focus on presenting a social work and social development perspective that encourage the recognition of the importance of strong and resilient communities to achieve stable well-being. Furthermore, the commitments were directed towards ensuring that policies and standards are consistent with addressing the root causes of poverty and oppression. These realities were also directed to ensure they promote sustainable social environments that make a reality of respect for human rights and dignity. The following section focuses on the four pillars of the Global Agenda.

### 3.2.1 The four pillars of the Global Agenda

The core themes were identified by the 3000 participants in Hong Kong. Their responses broadly endorsed the four priority pillars presented in Table 3.1 (IASSW, ICSW & IFSW, 2010). These four pillars will further be discussed in detail.

**Table: 3.1. The Four Pillars of the Global Agenda**

Social and economic inequalities within countries and between regions Growing inequalities and their implications The worsening marginalisation of populations and of the working poor Increased vulnerability of poor people in countries which do not have an adequate social protection floor Community disintegration
Dignity and worth of the person Human rights issues in relation to social, economic, cultural and political situations Respect for diversity and different belief systems, especially indigenous and first people's voices Political instabilities, violence, dominations, and the erosion of peace building processes Terrorism and modes of response by states and the modalities of handling global conflicts Migration, refugees, trafficking, immigrants, immigration and ways of handling these issues The role for social work practice, education and social development
Environmental Sustainability Disasters of natural and human origin, management and prevention Involvement of local communities in developing responses Implications for sustainable social development Protecting the physical environment Proactive engagement with social, human and ecological development
Importance of human relationships Children and families People with Disabilities People needing health and mental health services

People who are ageing

People with drugs and substance abuse problems

People suffering from violence within domestic and intimate relationships

*(Adapted from IASSW, ICSW and IFSW, 2010).*

### **3.2.1.1      *Promoting social and economic inequalities***

According to a case study done by the IASSW, ICSW and IFSW (2014:18), social and economic inequalities can be defined as disparities and injustice in distribution of both economic and social resources. In addition, these differences contribute to the creation of a gap between the rich and the poor. This eventually influences the well-being of people as well as the delivery of social services. On the other hand, Brand (2005) referred to social and economic equality as an access right that enforce a positive duty for the state to provide resources to all people, resulting in individuals in similar situations being treated equally. Internationally, social and economic inequalities are associated with income, social class, housing and access to clean drinking water, health services, education and infrastructure like road and communication networks (IASSW, ICSW & IFSW, 2014). Hence, the recognition of the need to promote social and economic equalities was proposed as one of the pillars of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development.

The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development admits that social and economic disproportions have contributed to high levels of increased poverty and inequality globally. In words of the IFSW, IASSW and ICSW (2012:1), it is highlighted that the unjust and poorly regulated economic systems, driven by the pressure from the market forces and lack of corporate social responsibility, have damaged the health and well-being of people and communities. In addition, these factors have promoted growing inequalities as well as poverty conditions. A report by the United Nations argued that inequality across the world does not pressurise only the poor, but it also influences negatively on overall growth, stability and well-being (United Nations, Department for Economic & Social Affairs, 2013). In support, Green (2012) specified that one of the greatest global challenges of the twenty-first century that concerns all

nations is ending inequality, as poverty and suffering cannot be restricted within borders.

The reality of social economic inequalities universally can best be understood through various reports and studies that were done previously. In a study by Philip, Tsedu and Zwane (2014), the authors found that the nature of inequality has not remained static. Social changes in opportunity and market processes have impacted on patterns of distribution, as have global processes and crises, and public policy has of course impacted on outcomes. However, the question remains: how and why inequality continues to be reproduced rather than being significantly eroded. Sharing similar perceptions, Deacon and Cohen (2011), Milanovic (2011b), Stiglitz (2012), the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (2011) and the United Nations Development Program (2013) all argued that the international reports and research studies on widening social and economic inequality across the world has continue to prove an increased gap between the haves and have not. For example, the IFSW Europe (2014) mentioned that Europe is experiencing a widening of economic and social inequality. Sell, Scheu, Huber and Leitenstorfer (2009) reported that in 2007, the United States had 13.3 million children living in poverty and by 2009, this ascended to 15.5 million. This also proves the existence of a wide gap between the majority of the population and the wealthiest. The same perceptions are also evident in Africa, as the IASSW, ICSW and IFSW (2014) identified that only a small minority possesses the wealth, resulting in affecting the well-being of most people. Hence, the recommendations for the utilisation of a holistic approach (ecological systems perspective) seemingly gaining support in social work practices in promotion of social and economic development.

Raninga and Zelnick, (2014) pointed out that a critical component in relation to the Global Agenda is how to achieve the four pillars. In promoting social and economic equality, the United Nations and other international agencies are aiming to achieve this through promoting global initiatives that will encourage global economy and social justice (IASSW, ICSW & IFSW, 2012; Jones & Truell, 2012; The Global Agenda for Social Work & Social Development, 2012; Truell, 2012). This will include working in cooperation with others internationally in promotion of social work practice and social development that will endorse sustainable development outcomes (The Global Agenda for Social Work & Social Development, 2012).

Given the context of this study, it is important that social work is not simply viewed as a matter of poverty reduction. Considering the Global Agenda's commitments to promote social and economic equalities, this requires social workers' and social development practitioners' involvement to support for global initiatives designed at attaining social and economic equalities. Hence, social workers are encouraged to move beyond the mitigation of poverty, unemployment and inequality to think through the social, cultural and political dimensions (IASSW, ICSW & IFSW, 2012). This supports for the adoption of the social development approach that is perceived as a matter of addressing challenges in all aspects of human life (Midgley, 2002). In Africa, South Africa is one of the countries that have opted for a social development approach towards addressing its social and economic inequalities.

In his speech, the Presidency of South Africa identified South Africa as one of the most unequal countries internationally (RSA, 2011a). The United Nations Development Programme (2013) positions South Africa as 121st in the world with a human development index of 0.629. Moreover, Statistics South Africa (2018) also indicated that the unemployment rate rose to 27.5 percent in the third quarter of 2018 from a 21.2 percent in previous period. It was the highest jobless rate since the third quarter of 2017, as the number of unemployed increased by 127 thousand to 6.21 million, which emphasises the inequalities being experienced in the country.

However, the Republic of South Africa, according to a speech by the presidency (2011b), acknowledges the progress that has been made since the implementation of the new welfare system in the post-apartheid era. Lombard (2008) and Patel (2012) indicated that in promoting social and economic equalities in the post-apartheid era, the South African government has engaged in a successful poverty alleviation strategy. The introduction of its social security system has been documented to have increased exponentially over the past 23 years: from an estimated 4 million beneficiaries in 1994 to 17,666,235 beneficiaries by September 2018 (SASSA, Statistical Report, 2018). As a result, the policy makers in South Africa were forced to ensure that social services are expanded to all citizens, resulting in the developmental approach being expressed in the Comprehensive Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare (2016) and the South African Constitution (Gray & Lombard, 2008). Brand (2005) asserts that the



South African Constitution is well-known for its intention to promote social and economic growth. The Constitution contains some social economic rights that include environment rights, rights to health, care, food, water, social security assistance and education. Sharing similar ideology, Lombard and Twikirize (2014) perceived the welfare system as pushes South Africa to engage in several programs in order to promote social and economic equality practices.

The South African welfare sector seemed to experience pressure as it shifted from the apartheid-era. This has been evident in the rapid changes in constitutional, political, economic, societal and personal (macro, mezzo and micro) factors. This have influenced social service delivery in South Africa, as social workers also experience pressure to change and adapt their interventions. With these rapid changes taking place, social workers should adapt to ensure they adhere to the various social policies, strategies and methods of service delivery that will promote social and economic equalities (Lombard and Twikirize, 2014).

In practice, to address the social and economic inequalities, some levels of development were identified as including the global, macro, mezzo and micro levels (Lombard, 1996). The global level has been recognised as entailing the participation of social work representatives in international forums and conferences (Lombard, 1996). South Africa promotes this level by engaging with other social service practitioners at national levels. This has been promoted by South Africa's ability to be involved in the Global Agenda of Social Work and Social Development through participation and research.

Since the macro level involves influences at a national level, to promote social and economic equalities in South Africa, social work practitioners should have an influence on social policy, political empowerment and social provision (Lombard, 1996). Gray (1996) identifies the mezzo level as being associated with the initiation of programmes aimed for change at the organisational level. Furthermore, the micro level (individual level) focussing on individual interventions, which result from the broader social problems (Donald et al., 2002). One of the programs the South African government engaged in, as it provides emphasis to social and economic equalities, is the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). The RDP programme will be

discussed further to clearly illustrates how it was implemented at the macro, mezzo and micro levels.

Within the context of the Global Agenda's first pillar, it is important to report on how the South African government has promoted social and economic equalities through the implementation of the RDP programme. This will assist in providing an overview of the extent to which the program has been supported on the various levels (macro, mezzo and micro). Mamburu (2004) supports this when asserting that the RDP programme was translated into a number of different programmes that were implemented by different government departments and non-governmental organisations.

According to Mamburu (2004:181), RDP is a macro-policy that was aimed at involving communities to actively participate in social programmes that were intended to develop them. The program was related to the development of meaningful community programmes that will link reconstruction and progress in a process that will promote growth. Therefore, it was implemented through national programs that were introduced. With the provincial and local governments being the closest levels of government next to the communities, this affords the communities an opportunity to communicate their needs.

Having the RDP program as a national policy (macro level) in South Africa, its successful implementation was supported through working at mezzo and micro levels. For example, some community-based organisations (forums) were formed to act as governing panels for the social programmes. These forums act as bridging the gap between the community and the RDP initiators. These individuals would link both the local government offices (micro) with the district government offices (mezzo), advising about the activities and development. This further enables the approval of the programmes that were then referred to the RDP offices (macro) level. It is through the interaction with the various representatives at individual, organisational and provincial levels that the government will know the progress taking place through the infrastructures that were constructed in various communities (Molla, 2011).

With South Africa engaging in the RDP programme, it clearly indicates the ability to support the implementation of the Global Agenda pillars at micro, mezzo and macro levels. Moreover, this seems to show the ability of South Africa to contribute towards

the following sustainable development goals (SDG) aimed for 2030 (United Nations, 2015).

Promoting social and economic equality, the SDG goals are to:

- Goal 5:** Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls;
- Goal 8:** Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all;
- Goal 9:** Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation;
- Goal 10:** Reduce inequality within and among countries;
- Goal 11:** Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe resilient and sustainable (Lombard, 2015).

However, with regards to promoting the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development, frontline social workers have to make important choices in order to critically reflect on their roles as they assist in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable people (Raninga & Zelnick, 2014). As a result, frontline social workers play various roles in different levels of practice. These roles include advocating for people's rights to both social security (to ensure social security for all) and development as they work with the vulnerable who do not have an adequate social protection, disintegrated communities (tightening up social ties) as well as the growing inequalities (to guarantee basic and income security for all) (Lombard, 2015; IASSW, ICSW & IFSW, 2010).

### **3.2.1.2      *Promoting dignity and worth of people's***

According to the IFSW and IASSW (2004), the theme promoting the dignity and worth of people is deeply entrenched in the values and ethics of humanitarian professions. Glensy (2011) and Misztal (2013) remarked that developing a common understanding of dignity seems challenging, as one person's understanding of dignity might differ from another person. McCrudden (2008:655) argues that the meaning of dignity is context-specific, varying significantly overtime within particular jurisdictions. Hence, dignity has been identified as the state or quality of being worthy of honour or respect of fundamental human rights (SACSSP, 2018). In addition, worth has been perceived as the recognition of value and significance, which goes as far as recognising the potential

in all people focusing over strengths. As a result, this indicates that self-respect and a sense of self-worth is core to social work practice and social development (Annan, 2003).

Whilst social work pays attention to helping people to change or modify their behaviours, this must start from a basic respect of their dignity and worth. However, Mukherjee, Warning, Carr and Shivdas (2011) documented that a lack of respect for dignity and worth of peoples is evident worldwide. The above identified authors revealed that this lack of respect is not only related to age, race and gender but it also has an effect on many minority groups (disabled or with certain health conditions). Furthermore, Mukherjee et al. (2011) claimed that large numbers of the world population, who lack access to safe living and working environments, clean water and certainty for the future, experience a lack of dignity and worth. In support, Annan (2003) added that there are many situations evident globally in which peoples' dignity and worth are not held in high regards.

Therefore, in achieving this pillar, much focus has been placed on promoting respect for diversity, advocating for education and training programmes that prepare social work and social development practitioners for ethical and informed interventions (IASSW, ICSW & IFSW, 2012:1). This was further supported by Truell (2012) who shared the view that in social work, well-versed interventions will promote the creation of socially-just global economic frameworks. These frameworks will assist in the recognition of the importance of respecting human rights, enhancing communal rights and corporate social responsibilities. As a result, this further supports the Global Agenda's commitment to promote human dignity and worth. United Nations (2015) suggested mutual working together within partnerships of all countries including South Africa to ensure the fulfilment of the following SDG goals.

***Promoting people's dignity and worth, the SDG goals are to:***

- **Goal 1:** End poverty in its forms everywhere;
- **Goal 2:** End hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture;
- **Goal 3:** Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages;
- **Goal 4:** Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

In respect of peoples' dignity and worth, South Africa has laid important foundations for human rights in its constitution through some international obligations (South Africa's Democracy & Human Rights, 2012). The capability of South Africa as a country to put in place its policies and laws such as the Constitutional Court, the South African Human Rights Commission and Public Protector seemed to support the respect of peoples' dignity and worth through implementation of human rights (South Africa's Democracy & Human Rights, 2012). Straub-Bernasconi (2012) stated that human dignity forms the value base of human rights. The ability to recognise human rights has been reinforced in the South African Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997).

Although the promotion of people's dignity and worth has been documented in the South African Constitution, which is the supreme law in the land, it is the view that social work practices are aimed at promoting the individual's well-being. This has been affirmed by the South African Council for Social Services Code of Ethics which states that cognisance is taken of the fact that social workers have individual rights as outlined in the South African Constitution (Act 108, 1996). It encourages social workers to respect the individuals, groups and communities' dignity and worth as they strive towards providing quality services (South African Council for Social Services Code of Ethics: 5). As a result, the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP, 2008) serves as a guideline to ensure that social workers conduct themselves ethically.

In a study done by Raninga and Zelnick (2014) on student social workers' perceptions on the extent to which the South African government had progressed in respect to the four pillars outlined in the Global Agenda, the authors proposed the implementation of the Global Agenda pillars in social work as a relevant tool in a South African context. This has been observed as a way of connecting local practice to global concerns. South Africa being one of the countries with a large number of citizens whose sense of dignity and worth seemed to be influenced by living in poverty conditions, it was noted that the recognition of peoples' dignity and worth have been accepted in most human rights policies. According to Bond (2004) this is evident through South Africa's adoption of the developmental approach to social welfare, resulting in engaging in

programs like the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) promoting human dignity and worth through supporting for appropriate housing structures.

In promoting the Global Agenda pillars, frontline social workers in their practice at micro level are in direct contact with people who are vulnerable. Social workers then focus on the right to adequate income, income security and standard of living; the right to adequate shelter and housing; the right to an adequate standard of health care; the right to education and the right to meaningful work (Ife, 2012). With regard to organisations at a mezzo level, the focus is on management roles and organisational development by helping organisations to provide more effective social services (Ife, 2012). Another critical role at a macro level is the need of social workers to get a more committed response from government that support individual rights (Ife, 2012).

Frontline social workers' commitment to the three levels of practice includes promoting human rights issues in respect of diversity and different belief systems. The involvement of frontline social workers in fighting terrorism, human trafficking, migration, political issues, family violence and their strategies in handling conflicts promote cohesive and peaceful societies (Lombard, 2015). Furthermore, these roles go as far as standing up against injustices and challenging violent state responses to people's actions to promote their dignity and worth (Global Agenda, 2012; IASSW, ICSW & IFSW, 2010; Lombard, 2015). In a study done by Raninga and Zelnick (2014) in a South Africa context, promoting the dignity and worth of people was discussed by students in regard to the expansion of policy responsive to human rights.

### **3.2.1.3      *Working towards environmental sustainability***

Climate change has become one of the biggest challenges facing contemporary societies. Human activities have resulted in formation of carbon emissions leading to the world's climate changing. Social work as a profession has an important role to play in: helping people understand the issues; promoting sustainable energy production and consumption; mobilising people to protect their futures through community social work; and proposing solutions to greenhouse gas emissions (Dominelli, 2012). As revealed in Copenhagen in 2009, social workers, the professionals charged with enhancing human-well-being from a human rights and social justice framework, are well-placed

to contribute to climate change policy discussions and interventions (Dominelli, 2012; Ife, 2012). In addition, Dominelli (2012) argue that social workers need to engage effectively with the science behind climate change; speaking about policies; developing resilience amongst individuals and communities; mitigating losses caused by climate change; helping to resolve conflicts over scarce resources; and responding to devastation caused by extreme weather events including floods and droughts in order to promote environmental sustainability

Most countries in the world have accepted environmental sustainability as important, resulting in the integrating of sustainability principles into their own policies and programmes. Liberatore (1997) argues that there is a need to consider environmental factors and other forms of organisation in order to achieve long-term development. Therefore, the relevance of participating in environmental sustainability have been confirmed with both the commitments of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development (2010) and the 2030 Agenda's commitments (United Nations, 2015).

Moreli (2011) perceives environmental sustainability as a process that unites human needs and ecosystem services. This specific author proposes that environmental sustainability refers to the ability to meet human needs without causing harm to the health of the ecosystem. In addition, Sutton (2004) agrees to the same idea when identifying environmental sustainability as the ability to preserve the qualities that are cherished in the physical environment in order to promote a natural balance amongst human needs and the ecology. Hence, this clearly recognises environmental sustainability as the practise whereby the strain placed on the environment will be positively supported in order to allow people to live well in support of each other with their environment (Sutton, 2004).

With growing concerns becoming more and more centred around sustainable developments, the IFSW (2012) encouraged social work as a profession to integrate environmental awareness into practice. The Global Agenda requires social workers and social development practitioners to align their activities and programmes with development initiatives that will promote the integration of the environment and human needs (Lombard, 2015:483). Stern (2006) indicated that if sustainability measures are to be ignored, future generations will face serious environmental risks as a result of climate change that has been linked to economic growth. Therefore, the need for



environmental sustainability has increasingly occupied a major area of social development in various settings.

According to the United Nations (2015), to promote environmental and community sustainability, there is a need to work towards the following SDG goals as they link with the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development.

Promoting environmental and community sustainability to:

- Goal 6:** Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all;
- Goal 7:** Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all;
- Goal 11:** Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable;
- Goal 12:** Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns;
- Goal 13:** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts;
- Goal 14:** Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development;
- Goal 15:** Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

According to Lombard's (2017) opening remarks at a World Social Work Day celebration, the idea behind promoting environmental sustainability is to promote what social workers are doing across the globe, namely facilitating sustainable community outcomes by applying a developmental and capacity-building approach, coupled with advocating for social justice and human rights. This aligned with the focus of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. Furthermore, Lombard (2017) emphasised the fact that social workers play a role in mitigating the impact of disasters that seriously disrupt the functioning of individuals, families and communities. Frontline social workers play various roles including tackling structural and individual forms of oppression that impact upon people who are already vulnerable to ensure that they and their environments are protected.



As the global economy rapidly evolve, many countries including South Africa are increasingly pressurised to promote environmental sustainability at a domestic level. This has been affirmed by the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (2006), stating that sustainable development methods are important. If employed, they could make a powerful contribution to reconstruction and development in South Africa through maintaining diverse, healthy and productive coastal ecosystems. In addition, Sowman and Brown (2006) highlighted that South Africa has engaged in various projects focussed on investigating aspects of sustainability at a local level.

There have been initiatives to introduce sustainability and these aspects relate to renewable energy, access to public transport and use of natural resources (Department of Environmental Affairs, 2012).

As frontline social workers engage with social, human and ecological development within micro, mezzo and macro levels, they become involved in activities and programmes that integrate the environment with human dimensions (Lombard, 2015). This requires initiatives that are aimed to protect the natural environment as well as the building of strong relationships with various agencies as they enter communities, deal with natural disasters to protect the physical environment (Global Agenda, 2012). Dominelli (2012:3) shared a similar understanding when highlighting that people experiencing disasters induced by climate change will require social work support to deal with the aftermath. As a result, social workers have a remit to work with the 'person in the environment' from a human rights and social justice perspective.

#### **3.2.1.4      *Strengthening recognition of the importance of human relationships***

Whilst the Global Agenda identifies work on social integration and cohesion as important, the global definition of social work has also managed to accommodate the Agenda's focus (Healey & Wairire, 2014; Truell, 2012). The global definition of social work reads as follows:

"Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation

of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing” (IASSW, 2014).

Hare (2004) specified that an international definition of social work has been in place since 2000. The 2000 definition has been perceived as having served its purpose, resulting in the reformulation of the above stated definition to ensure that it fits the social work dynamics and developments of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Jones & Truell, 2012). Hence, the Global Agenda aims to ensure that the importance of human relations is promoted as indicated in the current social work definition through promoting social cohesion in communities (Jones & Truell, 2012).

According to Rankopo and Osie-Hwedie (2011:723), social work is recognised as a formal helping system focussed on assisting with improving the well-being of individuals, groups, families, communities and societies across the globe. In order to support the recognition of the importance of human relations, social workers have to support people with psycho-social services. In addition, IASSW, ICSW and IFSW (2012) points out that, interventions should be aimed at reducing people’s social isolation and facilitate inclusion. The Agenda proposes the importance of reducing social isolation and promoting the building of social interactions through social relationships. Frontline social workers’ role of providing social support through engaging in interventions that promote skill development and capacity building in communities at all levels are highly encouraged. This will result in the strengthening of communities’ capacity to interact with governments, promoting social and economic development through policy development (IASSW, ICSW & IFSW, 2012). Strengthening the recognition of the importance of human relations is being focussed through the promotion of the following SDG goal:

- **Goal 16:** promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels (Lombard, 2015).

In promoting the strengthening of human relationships as well as the above identified SDG goal, South Africa has also introduced some programmes that promote unity, hence recognising the Global Agenda's pillar. Van der Merwe (2003) identifies the introduction of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa as one of the successful models of conflict resolution that was announced. Given the South African history of apartheid that encouraged for social divisions, this necessitate the reunion in order to ensure human relationships are reinforced.

In the context of South Africa, the introduction of the TRC was a product of the political compromises shaped during the discussions that ended apartheid. The country's promotion of a National Unity and Reconciliation Act established the TRC to investigate the politically motivated human rights violations that created divisions in the country (Mamburu, 2004; Van der Merwe, 2003). The main intent was to focus on unifying the divided nation, hence promoting strong relationships amongst the citizens. In many respects, the situation presented the church with the challenge of fighting the essential source of this division in order to support social change. According to Mamburu (2004), this task of overcoming social divisions and re-building relationships in a democratic South Africa is something that is now seen by society and church leaders as a key part of the church's role.

To further promote the strengthening of human relationships, the TRC made extensive use of church networks in local communities. Through engaging with the South African Council of Churches, several religions and local ministers, meetings and other crucial functions were arranged, ensuring effective community engagement as well as the outlining of support structures. This contributed to the use of the TRC as a strategy for internal reconciliation as well for promoting broader national and community relationships (Mamburu, 2004; Van der Merwe, 2003). This points toward South Africa's ability to promote human relations at the micro, mezzo and macro levels of interaction. As a result, the TRC is one of the most extensive interventions that South Africa has engage in, as it promotes the strengthening of human relationships. This further identifies South Africa's ability to work towards the promotion of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development in relation to this specific pillar.

In helping to strengthen the recognition of human relations, frontline social workers play a role in providing interventions aimed at reducing social isolation. Whilst social workers engage with children and families, they help children to feel safe through creating and maintaining a helpful relationship with children, families and professionals that prioritises the needs of a child, people with disabilities, the aged as well as those in need of health services (Global Agenda, 2012). Hence, frontline social workers' interventions maximise the patterns of interaction in communities, promoting social cohesion (Lombard, 2015).

### **3.3 CONCLUSION**

The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development is an important current initiative that the IASSW, IFSW and the ICSW are developing. With the effort focussed on strengthening the international profile of social work and social development, the agenda will promote the acknowledgement of social workers', educators' and social development practitioners' contributions. This will further support the consolidation of their contributions, since the actions are designed to support the four pillars of the Global Agenda: Promoting social and economic equalities, promoting dignity and worth of people, working towards environmental sustainability and strengthening recognition of the importance of human relationships.

Working towards the above-mentioned pillars can be regarded as a process that the main leading bodies (IASSW, IFSW & ICSW) have been involved in, in encouraging this specific initiative. As a result, this clearly indicates that there is still much to be learned about how the Global Agenda can be an effective instrument globally in the field of social work. This will also assist in the recognition of the roles that social work has taken in support of the Global Agenda, as these roles varies from micro interventions to global involvement. The following chapter comprises of the empirical findings of the study and further explain how the study was conducted.

## **CHAPTER 4**

# **THE PERCEPTIONS OF FRONTLINE SOCIAL WORKERS ON THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE GLOBAL AGENDA FOR SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, findings of the study on the perceptions of frontline social workers in Western Cape Province (South Africa) on their contributions towards the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development are presented. The first section of the chapter offers a brief discussion on the methodology, as this was dealt with in detail in Chapter 1. The second section focuses on the tabulated biographical information of the participants. The third segment provides an exploration of the interview discussions that were done, and an analyses is also presented in the form of themes, sub-themes and categories. These themes, sub-themes and categories are recorded in a table and later, each sub-theme is debated in-depth and supported with relevant literature. In addition, the empirical findings are presented within an ecological systems perspective as a theoretical substantiation. This chapter aims to critically examine the perceptions of frontline social workers towards their contributions to the four pillars of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development.

### **4.2 METHODOLOGY**

Following is a brief description of and reflection on the research methodology that was used for the study as discussed in depth in Chapter 1. The research approach, research design, sampling methods, data collection and data analysis employed in the research are briefly discussed.

#### ***4.2.1 Research approach***

To explore the perceptions of frontline social workers, a qualitative research approach was utilised. The use of a qualitative approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of data gathered during the interviews, as it allowed the researcher to

explore the assembled data. Hemme et al. (2017) avers that qualitative research provides the basis for exploring the data, leading to an in-depth understanding of the participants' feelings, opinions and point of views. As a result, this research approach was selected because the study sought to understand the perceptions of frontline social workers on their contributions towards the four pillars of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development.

#### **4.2.2 Research design**

This study utilised an exploratory and descriptive research design. Fouche and Schurink (2011) pointed out that exploratory research aims to offer an initial analysis of a particular phenomenon whilst descriptive research focuses on paying attention to the situation and social setting. Therefore, the exploratory and descriptive research designs were employed to allow for the opportunity to engage and share knowledge and opinions with the frontline social workers on their contributions towards the Global Agenda pillars. This further promoted a deeper understanding by being practically involved in the process.

#### **4.2.3 Sampling methods**

This study used a non-probability sampling method. The type of non-probability sampling method used in the study was snowball sampling, complemented by a probability sampling to select the first participant. Strydom (2011:33) argues that snowball sampling involves approaching a single case that is involved in the phenomenon to be investigated in order to gain information on other similar cases. The study utilised snowball sampling to assist in identifying suitable participants by allowing one participant to refer the researcher to another participant who fits the requirements of the study. Hence, for this specific study, snowball sampling assisted in identification of more frontline social workers or participants that are practically involved. As a result, the sampling methods assisted by directing the researcher to suitable participants.

The anticipated sample size comprised of 20 qualified frontline social workers from any institution practising for a period of a year and longer. However, Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) proposed that when no new information, theme or sub-themes can be

identified through having more interviews, data saturation has been reached. As a result, the researcher concluded with a sample size of 17 participants, as the narratives became repetitive with no new information being obtained. According to O'Reilly and Parker (2012) and Walker (2012) data saturation is reached when there is enough information to replicate the study. Guest et al. (2006) shared similar understanding when pointed that data saturation is reached when the ability to obtain additional new information has been attained and when further coding is no longer feasible. The participants who participated in this research were involved within their own professional capacity through one-on-one interviews. Annexure B (informed consent) was presented to all participants informing them about the purpose of the study. Participants were also made aware of their rights to confidentiality, refusal to participate or withdrawal during the process.

Therefore, the criteria for inclusion of participants included:

- Being frontline social workers practising at any institution/organisation in their professional capacity.
- Currently working or having worked as frontline social workers for a period of a year and longer.
- Have the ability to speak and communicate in the English language during the research process.

#### **4.2.4 Data collection**

Since the research was qualitative, semi-structured interviews were utilised. Considering that the study focus was centred on investigating the frontline social workers perceptions on their contributions to the Global Agenda, semi-structured interviews promoted for an in-depth exploration of the topic allowing the researcher to yield rich data. This was alluded by Patton (2008) when sharing the view that the use of semi-structured interviews enables the researcher to engage with the participants and understand the context within which the participants practice and interact. Therefore, the use of semi-structured interviews promoted the engagement and exploration as participants were asked open ended questions on their contributions towards the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development.

### 4.2.5 Data analysis

Schurink, Fouche and De Vos (2011) describe data analysis as a process of conveying order, structure and meaning to the information accumulated in the empirical research process, in order to give meaning to the collected data. In analysing the data, the researcher focussed on organising the data into themes, sub-themes as well as categories. Moreover, recurring data patterns were identified whilst organising the participants' narratives. After some recurring data patterns were detected, categories were formed and classified under themes and sub-themes with summaries related to the participants narratives explained at the bottom of the sub-themes supported with relevant literature. Finally, some conclusions and recommendations were drawn from the analysed data.

## 4.3 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

Table 4.1 reflects the identifying details of interviews with 17 participants in the study (n=17). Codes were used for the primary interviews (A-Q) to substitute the names of the participants in order to ensure their anonymity. Code of Standards and Ethics for Survey Research (CASRO) (2011) recommended that the researcher is able to confirm to the standards by following the rules and behavioural expectations about the most appropriate conduct of a given profession. The information regarding the participants' identifying details was included in the interview schedule to build a profile of the participants that contributed to the empirical investigation. The variables were: type of organization, nature of work, qualifications held, awareness of the Global Agenda and years of practice as a social worker.

Table 4.1. Participants' qualifications, knowledge and nature of work

Participant	Type of Organisation	Nature of work	Qualifications to practice as a social	Aware of the Global Agenda	Years of practice
A	Child protection services	Emotionally traumatised or abused children	Bachelor's degree in social work	No	35



Participant	Type of Organisation	Nature of work	Qualifications to practice as a social	Aware of the Global Agenda	Years of practice
B	Child protection services	Focus on neglect and abused children	Bachelor's degree in social work	No	10
C	Child protection	Foster children and foster grants	Master's in social work	Yes	33
D	Child protection services	children and families safety and well-being	Bachelor's degree in social work	yes	11
E	Child protection services	Work with neglected, sexually, emotionally abused children and families	Bachelor's degree in social work	No	2
F	Child protection services	Focus on child protection, marital problems, drug abuse	Bachelor's degree in social work	No	3
G	Child protection services	Intake social worker (do everything)	Bachelor's degree in social work	No	1.6
H	Child protection services	Focus on early intervention (mainly prevention services)	Bachelor's degree in social work	Yes	1.4

Participant	Type of Organisation	Nature of work	Qualifications to practice as a social	Aware of the Global Agenda	Years of practice
I	Child protection services	Focus on foster children and foster grants	Bachelor's degree in social work	Yes	1.6
J	Safe House (shelter)	Victims of domestic violence (mothers and children), Human trafficking	Bachelor's degree in social work	No	2
K	Child protection	Children and families	Bachelor's degree in social work	No	6
L	Child protection services	Children, youth and elderly	Bachelor's degree in social work	No	5
M	Hospice	People diagnosed with life threatening illness or terminal illness patients	Master's degree in social work	No	26
N	Child Protection Services	Children, Families, Elderly, Youth	Bachelor's degree in Social Work	Yes	2
O	Shelter	Homeless people	Bachelor's degree in Social Work	Yes	2
P	Child Protection services	Children, Families	Bachelor's Degree in Social Work	No	5

Participant	Type of Organisation	Nature of work	Qualifications to practice as a social	Aware of the Global Agenda	Years of practice
Q	School social worker	Children with challenges (disabilities), Parents	Bachelor's Degree in Social Work	No	3

#### **4.3.1 Characteristics and contexts of participants**

A brief summary of the participants in the study will be subsequently provided. This is done in terms of the participants' nature of work, qualifications as well as years of practice as social workers.

##### **4.3.1.1 Nature of work**

The majority of the participants were working in child protection services. Their work involved working with children who are neglected, abused, in foster care and family reunification services. Even though most participants were from child protection services, the study was well-balanced as it also involved social workers from other fields working in safe homes, focusing on homeless individuals, working in hospices with terminally ill patients and school social workers who are involved with school children and families. The involvement of participants working in different organisations was of importance to the study in order to identify how broad social work as a profession is. Pomrenke and Morris (2010:67) are of the opinion that social workers work in various contexts because of the overlap between the values in social work and other professions, hence social workers are trained to work with diversity. Having participants from different establishments participate in the study provides the study the opportunity to draw conclusions from various experiences presented.

##### **4.3.1.2 Qualifications**

As Jones and Truell (2012:454) pointed out, the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development was designed to strengthen the profile of social work and to enable social workers to make a strong contribution, hence the study opted to make use of qualified or trained participants to ensure professional requirements were taken into consideration. Nygren (2004:15) supported the use of qualified individuals, as the author indicated that the use of relevant expertise will allow for specialised knowledge to be linked to various experiences. As a result, of the participants who participated, 15 are holders of a Bachelor's degree in social work and two participants obtained a Masters' degree in social work. Onyiko, Nzau and Ngendo (2001) believed that the involvement of qualified social workers is fundamental to achieve an understanding of social work, as it also requires an understanding of its educational requirements.

#### **4.3.1.3      *Years of practice***

The study focussed on frontline social workers who have been exposed to social work practice in the field for a period of a year and longer in order to ensure the participants will present their perceptions in relation to the real experiences they encounter in their real work. This gives newly started frontline social workers time to grow and gain a better understanding of their professional theory and the necessary time to connect it to real practical experiences.

The existing literature suggested that the process of transition from university social work education to the workplace needs to be managed in order to allow newly appointed social workers to fully settle in (Bradley, 2008). The inclusion of participants who have been employed as social workers for five years and longer, positively influenced the study as these participants seemed to be more settled in their work. Hence, having more years of experience in the field of social work enabled the participants to be able to identify some practical examples of what they actually do, even though they were not aware of the Global Agenda.

On the other hand, only six of the participants presented having knowledge of the Global Agenda, and these were those frontline social workers who have worked for organisations for up to two years. These newly qualified social workers' have gained the knowledge of the Global Agenda through their tertiary education studies. It is thus

clear that frontline social workers, practicing for a number of years in the field, are not being made aware of the existence of the Global Agenda. No clear understanding of the Global Agenda and its purpose was offered, which raises questions about the collaboration and relationships of frontline social workers, and middle and top management of organisation in terms of keeping each other updated on what occurs on micro, mezzo and macro levels, and specifically on a global level.

#### **4.4 FOUR PILLARS OF THE GLOBAL AGENDA FOR SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

In this section, the four pillars of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development are presented as themes. Sub-themes are presented in accordance to social work levels of intervention and the categories identified from the data collected from the interviews, are presented in accordance to participant's responses, which will all be presented in a table and later discussed in detail. Palattiyil, Sidhva, Pawar, Shajahan, Cox and Anand (2018:5) pointed out that social work entails interventions at many levels, from local to global. The sub-themes identified will be associated to micro, mezzo and macro levels of the ecological systems perspective. Hence, categories are designed according to participants' responses. These are offered in the table below and will be discussed in more detail thereafter.

##### ***4.4.1 Emerging themes, sub-themes and categories***

From the 17 qualitative interviews that were conducted, the four themes that emerged from the empirical study are presented, as well as the sub-themes and categories that were identified.

Table 4.2. Themes, sub-themes and categories

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories
1. Promoting social and economic equalities	1.1. Micro	a. linking with available resources b. educating families and skill training
	1.2. Mezzo	a. work hand in hand with other organisations

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories
		b. skill development and job creation c. facilitate the social grants application process
	1.3. Macro	a. non-involvement at macro level
2. Promoting human dignity and worth of people's	2.1. Micro	a. respect for individual worth b. no discrimination in terms of services c. protect people's rights
	2.2. Mezzo	a. cultural awareness b. dignity of homeless and foreign people c. integration of social work theory
	2.3. Macro	a. approach different businesses for jobs for the vulnerable b. work hand in hand with policy documents
3. Working towards environmental sustainability	3.1. Micro	a. awareness and educational programs b. counselling and linking to resources
	3.2. Mezzo	a. cooperate with other organisations b. safety training or knowledge
	3.3. Macro	a. limited involved in environment sustainability
4. Strengthening recognition of the importance of human relationships	4.1. Micro	a. encourage for sense of belonging b. educating families and provide supportive services
	4.2. mezzo	a. social reintegration and networking b. participate in skill training programs c. involvement with the whole community
	4.3. Macro	a. Social work training and knowledge

#### 4.5 THEME 1: PROMOTING SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EQUALITIES

This theme focused on the first pillar of promoting social and economic equality as understood by the participants, and on their contributions to this specific pillar of the Global Agenda. Pardeck (1988:134) points out that the ecological systems approach provides strategies that allow the social worker to move through micro, mezzo to macro levels. Participants reflected their contributions in different interventions in practice towards promoting social and economic equality. The theme is explored through sub-themes that represent the three levels of the ecological systems perspective.

#### **4.5.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Micro level**

A number of sub-themes and categories were identified. Below, a summary of Categories (a) and (b) are provided, presenting the identified findings supported by participants' narratives at a micro level in relation to the promotion of social and economic equality.

##### **4.5.1.1 Category (a): Linking with available resources**

The Global Agenda (2012:2) strives to promote global initiatives aimed at achieving social and economic equality through supporting a people-focused global economy that is regulated to protect and promote sustainable development. In promoting social and economic equalities at a micro level, participants were able to identify the availability and accessibility of resources to individuals as vital. Most of the participants were able to identify their contributions as to identify local resources and link individuals to these various resources. This was presented through the participants' ability to work with other institutions involving service users, in order to become more socially and economically involved in local activities. This includes linking to training institutions, aftercare programs as well as various social service organisations. This was revealed as one participant who said<sup>1</sup>:

"I can get the clients another therapist and getting in contact with an organisation to offer them therapeutic services, I will approach the social workers in the schools to see if I can assist the children." (Participant A)

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<sup>1</sup> In the interest of authenticity, all narratives are presented verbatim and no amendments were made to grammar or sentence structure.

Participant I added:

“Like I said, we would refer the service users to Boland College, they do some training like domestic workers and work hand in hand with SASSA.”

In the above narratives, participants indicate that they are involved with individuals in linking them to resources required for assistance like social security in a South African context. Furthermore, the capability of frontline social workers to link individuals with resources have been recognised as a positive duty towards promoting social and economic equalities. Brand (2005) shared similar findings when stating that social workers capabilities’ to link vulnerable individuals to resources posits the importance of the right to social and economic equality.

#### **4.5.1.2      *Category (b): Educating families and skill training***

During the interviews, participants identified their contribution in provision of education to families on social and economic issues at a micro level to promote equality amongst individuals. This may involve engaging with family members and educating them about individual insights to be able to be tolerant to each other as well as facilitating in acquiring of vital skills to empower individuals. According to Gibelman (2005), a family is the primary social service agency, meeting the social, educational and health care needs of the members. Social workers can value families through assisting them to recognise and build on their strengths to improve their lives. In identifying their contributions towards social and economic equalities through involvement with families, some of the narratives that were outlined by the participants were:

“...for example, I work with one of my clients, he is in matric now. He is homosexual, so he doesn’t feel he belongs in his family because his family is not accepting it at all. So in that case I need to work with the family, I am working with the family educating them on his stance because how they perceive it for them it’s a sin and not acceptable, they are not open minded.” (Participant E)

In addition, another said:

“So we do intervention with them and how to overcome it, empower them and help them to go out and find a job to help them to break down that vicious cycle of abuse, so we focus on doing therapy and skill training.” (Participant N)



From the above narratives, it can be reasoned that frontline social workers' attributes towards social and economic equalities include empowering families through education to encourage more sustainable social and economic equalities. Participants identified their ability to provide vulnerable families with relevant knowledge and skills as a major priority in empowering individuals. Jones and Truell (2012:463) further allude that the ability of social workers to utilise their specialised knowledge in empowering individuals' and families is legitimate and should be acknowledged, as they bring to multi-environments specific and often unique combinations of insights, skills and expertise.

#### **4.5.2 Sub-theme 1.2: Mezzo level**

The categories that were recognised during the interviews in relation to participants at mezzo level are presented under Category (a), (b) and (c).

##### **4.5.2.1 Category (a): Work hand in hand with other organisations**

In order to create a more socially just and fair world for future generations, the Global Agenda (2012:1) pledges that role players will work with the UN and other international bodies, communities and organisations in supporting, influencing and enabling structures and systems that positively address the root causes of oppression and inequalities. A pattern that was recognised within the theme of promoting social and economic equality within a mezzo level, was the role of social work in promoting the working together of various organisations. This was seen through frontline social workers' ability to refer, connect and facilitate various processes that promote peoples' social and economic equalities. This is outlined in the narrative extracts below:

"I liaise with other organisations to access information." (Participant F).

Participant E supported this finding by further verbalising that:

"I would help the clients to make up a curriculum vitae. We have a training centre in the area that am working with were we help in finding jobs and can also refer service users to Boland College where they do training like mechanics." (Participant E).

These narratives seem to link with what Lombard (2015) and other authors proposed as frontline social workers' contributions towards social and economic equalities, including income generating programs, after school homework classes, job training, and job referral programmes (Midgely & Conley, 2010; Lombard & Twikirize, 2014). It can be concluded from the narratives above that the participants' involvement with other organisations promoted working relationships, which assist in identifying and meeting the needs of individuals at this specific level of intervention.

#### **4.5.2.2      *Category (b): Skill development and job creation***

According to the UN (2015:4), the Global Agenda's commitments are aligned with the call in the 2030 Agenda to transform the world to a more just equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world, in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met. For this kind of socially inclusive economy to be promoted, participants pointed out that their participation with the vulnerable in skills development as well as job creation programs are essential towards breaking the progression of inequalities. The UN (2015) also identified the importance of skill and job creation activities in promoting social and economic equalities, as it encourages for the implementation of relevant strategies and programmes of action, which are integral to the 2030 Agenda.

The following narratives identify the importance of skill development and job creation programmes.

Participant C said:

"...but they come to do something, they come to knit or do whatever small things but is not that really work or making a job but trying to equip them with little skills."

Participant E added:

"...we have a training centre that offers different courses and the people get a statement from hospitality and hair dressing."

As indicated above, cooperation between frontline social workers and other role players including training centres for knitting, hair dressing and hospitality, were strongly commended by the participants as key in social work towards the promotion of social and economic equality on a mezzo level. In support, The Global Agenda (2012) and Bell and Hafford-Letchfield (2015) states that social workers and social development practitioners should use their talents, capacity, knowledge and skills to endorse social and economic equality through transformative critical action.

#### **4.5.2.3      *Category (c): Facilitate the social assistance application process***

The development approach to social welfare, as enshrined in the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997), has served as a foundational policy guiding social work practice in a South African context. The White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) embraced Midgley's (1995) definition of social development that links welfare to social and economic development. In promoting social and economic development, South Africa has expanded its social security system as a way of poverty alleviation (Holscher, Ebeling & Schwarz, 2008; Lombard, 2008; Patel, 2012). Participants reflected on the importance of this policy-driven change in the social-economic well-being of vulnerable people in South African context. One participant reflected:

“I provide assistance to ensure those in need access social grants like child grant, especially for the children to provide for their well-being”. (Participant F).

However, Participant C was of the opinion that:

“In assisting, I will refer service users to SASSA or assist in the process of applying for a child support grant or foster care grant to ensure they receive a little beat of money.”

As portrayed in the above descriptions, participants acknowledged their participation in facilitating the access to social assistance grants as of great importance in improving conditions for the downgraded population at a mezzo level in a South African context. Within the context of literature, this was further reflected on in the Comprehensive Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare (2016), which acclaims for devising appropriate and integrated strategies to address the alienation and social marginalisation of vast sectors of the population who are living in poverty. However, Participant C's narrative might present questions on the extent to which social

assistance grants have been successful in helping to promote social and economic equalities in South Africa. Engelbrecht (2011) remarks that the majority of households in South Africa suffers a lack of opportunity to improve its situations, in spite of a relative sophisticated social welfare system.

#### **4.5.3 Sub-theme 1.3: Macro level**

Following is a representation of participants' narratives in relation to the macro level with regards to their contributions towards the promotion of the social and economic equality, presented in Category (a).

##### **4.5.3.1 Category (a): Non-involvement at macro level**

Policy practice is an integral element of social work in all settings at local, state and national levels, as well as within micro, mezzo and macro levels of intervention. Policy practice include using social work skills to propose and change policies in order to achieve the goal of social and economic justice. Jansson (2005) perceived policy practice as aimed to help powerless groups, such as women, children, the poor, gay men and lesbians, and people with disabilities to improve their resources and opportunities. In promoting social and economic equality at a macro level, policy practice was identified as the main focus. However, the participants were able to distance their involvement at macro practices, as they pointed to their participation on micro and mezzo levels and not on a macro level:

"...we only get involved at ground and organisation levels, we are not part of the macro level, I think people making policies must come and see how it is on the ground level".  
(Participant D)

This was further emphasised by Participant P who said:

"...we do not get involved on the macro level, management make their policies and we have to follow it".

The above narratives clearly identify frontline social workers' non-involvement in policy formulation at a macro level. This is one of the gaps that the participants were able to recognise, as it is not their focus and they mostly engage with individuals at micro and

mezzo levels doing what they referred to as ‘the ground work’. Ife (2012) criticised the non-involvement of frontline social workers in policy formulation, as the author suggested that it is through policy development and advocacy that improvements in services and policies take place and that social justice is promoted. Closed systems can be identified by their lack of sufficient inputs, which contributes to some rigid and unchanging patterns. As a result, a completely closed system will experience some limited interactions and exchanges within the environment, which influences negatively on the other systems as well as the environment (Chetkow-Yanoov, 1997). In the context of a need to support systems that promote positive interactions, Bell and Hafford-Letchfield (2015) aver that social workers can promote open systems by engaging in situations and perform an analysis by utilising their specialised knowledge. Hence, the study identifies the need for frontline social workers to be active on a macro level. Walker and Dimmock (2002) have also questioned the non-involvement of frontline social workers in policy formulation as creating a gap. The authors perceived participation at a macro level as important, as it will assist in setting both the framework and constraints within which social workers work, and the type and level of services they can provide.

## **4.6 THEME 2: PROMOTING THE DIGNITY AND WORTH OF PEOPLE**

In this subdivision, participants were asked to share their perceptions of their contributions towards promotion of human dignity and worth in relation to the ecological systems perspective levels (micro, mezzo and macro). The sub-themes, categories presented as (a), (b) and (c), and narratives that were identified, are discussed below.

### **4.6.1 Sub-themes 2.1: Micro level**

Below is a presentation of the categories that participants described with regards to their perceptions towards their contributions towards promoting human dignity and worth at a micro level. This is offered in the context of Category (a), (b) and (c).

#### **4.6.1.1 Category (a): Respect for individual worth**

According to the International Federation of Social Workers and International Association of Schools of Social Work (2004), the theme promoting the dignity and worth of people is deeply embedded in the values and ethics of the humanitarian professions. For that reason, social workers are promoting and contributing towards dignity and worth through enabling people to live respectfully and valuing their contributions. This was outlined in the following narrative:

“I also strongly believe that if a person walks in my therapy room, when walk out they must walk out there with more dignity”. (Participant A).

The above narrative clearly indicate that the involvement of social workers with vulnerable people demonstrates respect and it reinforces individuals’ personal dignity and worthiness, as active engagement and participation is fundamental to giving people a voice (IFSW, IASSW & ICSW, 2012). Furthermore, the importance of endorsing human dignity and worth was also identified in the narratives as not only ethically right, but also as the cornerstone for effective responses and solutions when working with vulnerable individuals. This was presented in narratives like:

“I think in a way of promoting the client’s dignity as a person not as a gay person”. (Participant E)

Moreover, Participant P added that:

“If I refer, I make follow ups and that’s a way of giving that person dignity to make sure if person have been helped”.

In support, the Global Agenda (2012) highlighted the need for social workers to make use of social strategies and respect for all peoples’ rights to influence individuals’ dignity and worth at a micro level. This idea was further reinforced by Sims et al. (2014) who suggested social workers’ involvement with service users to be supportive in order to enable vulnerable individuals to use their own abilities to regain or maintain control over their lives.

#### **4.6.1.2      *Category (b): No discrimination in terms of service***

Human dignity and worth forms the value base of human rights, therefore recognising that the dignity and worth of each person is revealed in the quality of relationships and

services social workers provide to people (Straub-Bernasconi, 2012). This was further revealed when participants described how they promote dignity and worth at a micro level to all in need through ensuring services to all people. Participant A highlighted this in the following narrative:

“...whether it’s a client paying or homeless people there is no distinguish in terms of service”.

In support, Participant K also stated that:

“I don’t really see people differently, I will respect if someone tell me that this is his belief system, I will respect that and work around that. But I don’t see any differences between people and between the problems or between the needs, it’s the same, I take a problem as a problem”.

Therefore, it is evident that frontline social workers are promoting human dignity and worth by providing equal services to all. Having time to engage with individuals and deliver services equally, regardless of race, gender, religion or being homeless, clearly indicate how the participants fight against discrimination of services, to ensure individuals’ dignity and worth is preserved. Lombard (2015:486), proposed that promoting human dignity and worth translates to a world of equal opportunities as well as having access to social services. The ability to recognise the dignity and worth of the other person has been perceived as centred on the frontline social workers’ commitment to engage with others and to take the perspective of the other person, regardless of the person being in need or not (UN, 2014).

#### **4.6.1.3      *Category (c): Protect peoples’ rights***

The Global Agenda (2012) advocates for the universal implementation of international conventions and other instruments on the social, economic, cultural and political rights of all peoples, and for social strategies that build cohesive and peaceful societies. This includes standing up against injustices, and challenging violent state responses to people’s actions to defend their rights. The participants were able to identify protecting individuals’ rights as another way in which they promote people’s dignity and worth at a micro level. This is highlighted by the following narrative:

“...this is one of our main focus because we work with most vulnerable children in society and we are there to protect them so we always kind of promote their dignity as a child who does not always have a voice to say am right or to say no. So we speak for them, protect them at the same time and promote their dignity as a child or a person”. (Participant E)

For that reason, the above narrative seem to clearly give an indication of how frontline social workers become involved in promoting peoples’ dignity and worth through protecting human rights. In working towards the promotion of human dignity, the participants also identified their ability to protect human rights through following the requirements of certain policy documents. One participant presented that:

“...promoting dignity links hand in hand with the Bill of rights that you have to respect peoples’ rights”. (Participant J)

In agreement, Lombard and Twikirize (2014:318) shared the understanding that human dignity and worth is promoted by social work values and ethics, as ethical practice is linked to policies, service agreements and is demonstrated in actions during practice. Protecting human dignity and worth is essential as a humanitarian value system which is enshrined in international conventions and professional ethical codes. In support, the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) also documented the recognition of the code of conduct by social workers when working with individuals to ensure their dignity and worth is preserved (SACSSP Act, 19978 of 110).

#### **4.6.2 Sub-theme 2.2: Mezzo level**

Participants were asked to describe their contributions in relation to the promotion of human dignity and worth at a mezzo level. The findings are offered in Categories (a), (b) and (c), supported by participants’ narratives underneath.

##### **4.6.2.1 Category (a): Cultural awareness**

According to McCrudden (2008:65), an understanding of dignity can differ between each individual perception hence, the author proposed that the meaning of dignity is



therefore context-specific, varying significantly over time within particular jurisdictions. As a result, regaining of self-dignity and a sense of self-worth is core to social work practice when working with different races, cultures and belief systems. In promoting the dignity and worth of people, frontline social workers identified cultural awareness as one of the most important aspects on a mezzo level. The participants were able to point out that social work as a profession, involves working with all individuals and cultural awareness is one of the tools that enables the participants to be able to promote individuals' dignity and sense of worthiness as they work together. This was revealed by Participant F in the following narrative:

"I work with people in my area of different races, Xhosa or Coloureds. So I need to equip myself with the knowledge of for example Xhosa people and incorporate this in my service because that's the only way they will understand, so meet them on their level and learn from them, that's how I promote their dignity".

Gray and Coates (2010) and Rankopo and Osie-Hwedie (2011) also observed the idea of cultural awareness as important in promoting the dignity and worth of individuals, as the authors shared the view that being culturally aware recognises the significance of the cultures, values and of the diverse range of communities around the world. According to NASW (2015), being culturally aware is an indication of attitudes, knowledge, and skills that enable effective cross-cultural practice. Hence, cultural consciousness requires of social workers to examine their own cultural backgrounds and identities while in search of the necessary knowledge, skills and values that can enhance the delivery of services to people with varying cultural experiences. Cultural competence have been identified as being implemented by social workers at three intersecting levels: the individual (micro), institutional (mezzo), and societal (macro) levels (NASW, 2015: 65).

#### **4.6.2.2      *Category (b): Dignity of homeless and foreign people***

Another recurring testimony that was discovered within the theme of promoting human dignity and worth at a mezzo level was the ability of frontline social workers to work with the poor of the poorest and foreign nationals in a dignified way. This was identified through the participants' ability to engage with the homeless as well as offering social support to foreign nationals through helping them obtain birth certificates for their

children as well as any assistance required. The ability of frontline social workers to work with the poorest was highlighted by Participant A in the following narrative:

“...we are fortunate to get a piece of land and have containers there and get homeless people work in streets, clean the streets, and they get a meal as part of payment and a sixty rand as payment so that they will be able to pay at night shelter where they go and sleep”.

Similar perceptions were also revealed by Participant H in relation to the dignity of assistance social workers give to foreign nationals:

“...we also work with people who come from outside of South Africa, we have a lot of those cases. We help them with the process of getting birth certificates of their children. So we go to home affairs six times a month and through this we really try to protect people dignity and worth a lot by rendering the services to everyone”.

As a result, the involvement of frontline social workers with the most vulnerable as well as foreign nationals (refugees) have been documented as the commitment of the social work profession to recognise the dignity and worth of people who were forced to escape war and conflict in their own countries through support services provided at mezzo level (Truell, 2012). UNHCR (2015) pointed out that a total number of 586 000 refugees and asylum seekers still pending appeal in South Africa, which strongly suggests the need for social work services. Furthermore, Rule-Groenewald et al. (2015) also shared the view that in a recent estimate by the Human Sciences Resources Centre, South Africa is home to an approximately 200 000 homeless people and the top reasons for heading to streets included experiences with abuse, family problems, economic difficulties at home and search for independency. Hence, social workers' involvement with the vulnerable promote their individual sense of worthiness and dignity.

#### **4.6.2.3      *Category (c): Integration of social work theory***

The necessity for specialised social work knowledge in a South African context was also identified as crucial towards promoting human dignity and worth. Hence, the ability of frontline social workers to work from a holistic approach (ecological systems perspective) emerged as an important aspect during the interviewing process. Sharing

similar perceptions, Donald et al. (2002:44) proposed that the ecological systems perspective assists in understanding how individuals and groups are interdependent, interact and link with various dynamics at different levels. From the participant's narratives, the application of social work literature as well as working in relation to all systems that are involved in the situation, which the frontline social workers referred to as a holistic approach, was pointed out as of great importance, as indicated in the narratives:

"...we tackle each situation from a holistic point of view". (Participant C)

Participant H added that:

"...first we learnt during studies the principles of Biestek in social work, these play a lot when carrying interventions as it always remind me not to judge people or treat them unfairly in relation to their beliefs or cultural understanding".

Pardeck (1988:134) avers that an ecological systems perspective in social work provides strategies that allow the social worker to move from a micro level of intervention, to a macro level. Sharing similar perceptions, Lombard and Twikirize (2014) stated that a holistic approach to service delivery is essential to acknowledge the worth of people.

#### **4.6.3 Sub-theme 2.3: Macro level**

Participants were asked to provide their contributions towards promoting of human dignity and worth at a macro level. The categories identified are presented below in Category (a) and (b), supported by the participants' narratives.

##### **4.6.3.1 Category (a): Approach different businesses for jobs for the vulnerable**

Participants were asked to identify what they do at a macro level in relation to promoting human dignity and worth. From the narratives, it is evident that frontline social workers in a South African context work together with other institutions in promoting individuals dignity and worth, especially those vulnerable individuals.

The following narratives were identified from the participants. Participant A verbalised that:

“Service users can work them up to a team leader and once one is a team leader we can approach different businesses ask them this is the skills we saw in this person maybe you can perhaps give the person job”.

Supporting the importance of working together with various organisations, Participant K further agreed that:

“We do engage with other businesses looking for jobs to help people get out their difficult circumstances through assisting in finding job”.

Participants were able to indicate how they have cooperated with other businesses in their communities to ensure the poorest of the poor are assisted to work themselves up to a place where they feel more part of the larger community through involving them or working with them. This act was strongly supported by Palattiyil et al. (2018:5) who mentioned that social work entails social work intervention at many levels, from local to global, engaging to effect both social and structural changes with the aim of promoting human dignity as well as social development.

#### **4.6.3.2      *Category (b): Work hand in hand with policy documents***

In a South African context, the practice of social work has been greatly influenced by various policy documents that guide the social service professions. Some of the policy documents identified included the Integrated Service Delivery Model (ISDM) and the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare (2016). The ISDM of the Department of Social Welfare (South Africa, 2006:05) aims to construct a clear indication of the nature, scope, extent and level of social services by providing a comprehensive national framework. On the other hand, the Review of the White Paper (2016), which deals with key issues in the restructuring of social welfare services and programmes, also provides a general outline of the instruments needed to deliver effective and appropriate services (DSD, 2016). The utilisation of policy documents was particularly evident in some of the social work narratives that emerged from the interviews held. The participants were able to mention some of the policy documents they use as guidelines in providing services. These descriptions include the following:

"I always keep in mind the Bill of Rights that I have to respect people that I am working with no matter what their circumstances are ..." (Participant I)

"We utilise a developmental approach guided by the (ISDM) and the Children's act is like our daily bible..." (Participant G)

"We follow the requirements of the White Paper for Social Welfare". (Participant F)

Therefore, the participants' narratives clearly prove the capability of frontline social workers to implement various policies in their daily work. This indicate their strength in promoting human dignity and worth at a macro level through abiding to the policy documents they work hand-in-hand with. In support, Engelbrecht and Strydom (2016:6) reflect that a range of Acts are currently guiding social work practices, with the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, Act 108 of 1996 (RSA, 1996a), primarily providing the right of access to appropriate social assistance to those unable to support themselves.

#### **4.7 THEME 3: WORKING TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

In relation to the theme of promoting environmental sustainability, a number of sub-themes and categories were identified. The findings will be presented as sub-themes with identified categories, supported by relevant theory as well as the participants' responses under each level (macro, mezzo and macro) of the ecological systems perspective.

##### **4.7.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Micro level**

The categories and participants' descriptions of their contributions towards promotion of environmental sustainability at a micro level are discussed under Category (a) and (b) below.

#### **4.7.1.1      *Category (a): Awareness and educational programs***

Natural resource depletion and the adverse impact of environmental degradation and climate change, undermine the ability of all countries to achieve sustainable development (UN, 2015). The Global Agenda is aligned with the focus of the 2030 Agenda in that both see people and the planet as important. To promote environmental sustainability, the Global Agenda commits social workers and social development practitioners to align their activities and programmes with development initiatives that integrate environment with human dimensions (Lombard, 2015:487). In support, Campanini and Lombard (2018:488) stated that in going forward with the promotion of environmental sustainability, the IASSW reiterates its commitments to:

- Equitable development for everyone across the world
- Equitable distributions and claims on all resources by all people
- Social justice and environment justice for all.

In promoting environmental sustainability at a micro level, the participants were able to point to awareness and educational programs as one way to encourage individuals to engage in sustainable practices. Because there recently has been a pressing water crisis in the Western Cape (South Africa), most of the participants were able to relate their experiences with promoting sustainability, making use of their interventions based on the current water crisis. This is outlined in Participant E's narrative:

"I think with water crisis we would go up to schools and educate them with the importance of water and how we can serve water, bringing awareness about environmental sustainability".

Participant C added that:

"...we know that fire shacks is a high risk, so we do have a program doing fire safety".

The capability of frontline social workers to intervene in contemporary social issues that have an impact on individuals and the environment, strongly support their ability to promote the sustainable living of individuals. Gray and Coates (2012) and Dominelli (2012) shared the understanding that social workers' focus are not only on climate change but also on other factors affecting peoples' well-being and is an indication of their engagement in promoting sustainable practices.

#### **4.7.1.2      *Category (b): Counselling and linking to resources***

According to Jones (2013:213), using the ecology as an overarching thematic lens, and ecological justice as a serious concern, create an opportunity for social work education to identify key ecological concepts and values that can be used as a foundation to develop the necessary knowledge, values, and skills for professional practice. In terms of promoting environmental sustainability, participants were able to identify their ability to work with affected individuals involved in disasters, for example a fire, by doing counselling and connecting the individuals to various resources as a way of promoting sustainable living in families. Frontline social workers' involvement in linking to resources was also identified under the first pillar (promotion for economic and social equality), which further identifies how these pillars are interlinked to each other. The participants highlighted their capabilities in narratives such as the following: "So many of our clients stay in wood houses. Some houses were burnt down. So in a case like that I would do traumatic briefing and also try to link the people with municipality and department of housing". (Participant E)

Gray and Coates (2012:24) emphasize that the environment must be protected to support human sustainability, and therefore affirm that issues such as food security, land protection and practices and actions that support human well-being are supported and valued. Nevertheless, at the latest World Social Work Conference in Dublin (2018) it was agreed that the social work professional should focus on people as connected to both their physical and social environments, as it appears appropriate and critical to the well-being of both people and planet (IASSW, ICSW & IFSW, 2018:4). As a result, it was identified that several authors are now paying attention to environmental or green social work and ecological justice (Gray & Coates, 2012; Dominelli, 2012; Gray, Coates & Hetherington, 2013).

#### **4.7.2    *Sub-theme 3.2: Mezzo level***

Participants were asked to share their perceptions on their contributions towards the promotion of environmental sustainability at a mezzo level. Below are the identified Categories (a) and (b) and narratives that presented.

#### **4.7.2.1      *Category (a): Cooperate with other organisations***

Within the context of promoting environmental sustainability at a mezzo level, the participants identified their involvement with other organisations and some roles frontline social workers play, as critical aspects. The ability to cooperate with other organisations have been documented in the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development (2012:4) as an important aspect towards sustainable communities through capacity building in response to environmental challenges and human and natural disasters. This was further supported at the World Conference held in Dublin (2018) as the IASSW, ICSW and IFSW regard the working together of inter-disciplinary groups as fundamental when responding to the effects of climate change (Campanini & Lombard, 2018:488). The following is one of the descriptions that emerged from the participants' narratives:

"...we work with other organisations, we are very involve in a recycling project because this is another area to work with vulnerable people because they can collect a lot of stuff and can also make money out of it. It's a physical trolley but it does have certain sections a person can use it to transport things collect but at night can change it to a shelter thing if it rains or so". (Participant A)

From the preceding narratives, it is evident that one of the roles frontline social workers engage in is to work with people affected by natural disasters or disasters of human nature. Therefore, frontline social workers will provide some work jointly with other institutions to ensure required resources are retrieved. Hence, Palattiyil and Sidhva (2012) and Ting and Blyth (2010) perceived social workers as having great success in operating and managing the after-effects of natural disasters and supporting efforts to enable re-establishment.

#### **4.7.1.2      *Category (b): Safety training or knowledge***

Palattiyil et al. (2018:9) shared the view that the challenge of achieving the Global Agenda outcomes depends on how social work workforce can be develop and nurtured, and equipped with the skills and expertise in implementing these ambitious goals. In promoting environmental sustainability at a mezzo level, participants



identified the utilisation of social work knowledge and skills in providing training in communities as essential. In the following narratives, participants identified the involvement of frontline social workers with communities imparting knowledge and training programs as important. This is highlighted in descriptions such as:

“...the other thing that I want to say is, we know that fire shacks is a high risk, so we do have a program doing fire safety telling people to keep a bucket full of sand next to your door”. (Participant C)

The roles frontline social workers embrace was further accentuated by the UN (2015) that identified social workers’ participation, self-reliance and ability to empower others as key principles often applied by social workers when delivering services.

#### **4.7.3 Sub-theme 3.3: Macro level**

Participants were asked to discuss their perceptions of their contributions towards promoting environmental sustainability at a macro level. The data that emerged is presented in Category (a), supported by participants’ narratives.

##### **4.7.3.1 Category (a): Limited involvement in environmental sustainability**

At a macro level, participants portrayed their limited involvement in relation to promoting environmental sustainability. Non-involvement of frontline social workers at a macro level has been previously verbalised by participants (see Section 4.5.3.1), as they distance themselves from contributing to policy formulation. Participants identified macro intervention as the responsibility of management. Gray and Coates (2012) went on to highlight the existence of this gap when sharing the view that an adequate connection is not yet made between social work and environmental issues.

The existence of minimal attention to climate change and environmental degradation in social work teaching, research and practice was also further recognised as social workers contributing to a lesser extend or none at all (Dominelli, 2012). Hence, the development of new theories and practices that enhance social workers’ capacity to intervene in environmental issues, was also called for (Campanini & Lombard, 2018). Non-involvement of frontline social workers in environmental issues was one of the

most apparent discourses amongst the participants, as most felt that promoting environment sustainability is not their focus. This was presented in narratives such as: “I don’t really think that we do that, that is not a big focus of social workers like disasters like fires and stuff like that...” (Participant G)

“We may be lacking in environmental sustainability because that is more for disaster and fire rescue departments”. (Participant Q)

As a result, this proves the existence of the gap in the contribution of frontline social workers in promoting environmental sustainability at a macro level. Hence, the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development (2012:4) proposed for the encouraging and facilitating of research to promote social work’s role in relation to disasters and environmental sustainability.

#### **4.8 THEME 4: STRENGTHENING RECOGNITION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS**

The pillar (theme) of strengthening and recognising the importance of human relationships will be discussed in terms of the three levels of the ecological systems perspectives (micro, mezzo and macro). Therefore, the theme will be presented in sub-themes as well as the categories that emerged during the interviewing process.

##### **4.8.1 Sub-theme 4.1: Micro level**

The categories that became evident from the participants’ narratives that developed from the interviews that were held, are discussed below in Category (a) and (b) in relation to the micro level.

##### **4.8.1.1 Category (a): Encourage a sense of belonging**

The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development identifies work on social integration and cohesion as important areas for social work contribution (Healy &

Wairire, 2014). The Global Agenda (2012:4) recognises the importance of reducing social isolation and building social interaction through social relationships, embedding the principles of social cohesion, development and inclusion. A major reality that became evident during the participants' narratives was the fact that frontline social workers mainly contribute towards the strengthening of human relations through encouraging a sense of belonging in families. Even though most of the participants work in child protective services (see Table 4.1 for the characteristics and contexts of participants), they clearly point out that they cannot work in isolation with the child, but require that all family members are involved, as indicated in this description:

"I work with the whole family trying to keep them together". (Participant C)

Many of the participants' responses during the interviews were largely focussed on assisting with establishing strong ties amongst the family members, hence encouraging a sense of belonging. This was alluded to in the following narrative:

"...but as social workers, we get more involved in a family level you will get involved try to help in a matter, all kinds of relationships is important if it is family, church, if it is whatever we promote that". (Participant M)

In agreement, the IFSW (2014) also emphasised the importance of strengthening human relations at a micro level within social work practice, as individual relationships form the backbone of the profession. Contributing to the formation of strong family relationships was identified as the foundation on which the frontline social workers are able to promote the strengthening and recognition of human relationships. Participants mentioned that they try to keep children in their families in order to create a sense of belonging rather than moving the child away. This was further revealed in narratives such as the following:

"...mostly, in the work I do, the main focus is to keep the child with the family, and if is not possible of making that happen, will keep the child in the extended family and if that cannot happen it will be within the community as taking the child out of the community will be the last resort". (Participant B)

Woodhead and Brooker (2008) suggested that having family members know that they are accepted, builds a sense of belonging that is essential to any individual's well-being and happiness, and also to the development of a positive identity. As a result of this, belonging positions the foundation for a strong and resilient sense of self, which can

be sustained through transitions into the wider world. The above analysis seems to provide a clear understanding of how participants' involvement with families, encouraging for a sense of belonging, contribute towards the strengthening and recognition of the importance of human relations.

#### **4.8.1.2      *Category (b): Educating families and providing supportive services***

Social workers' role in engaging with service users should be supportive in order to enable vulnerable people to use their own abilities to regain or maintain control over their lives (Sims et al., 2014). In supporting the strengthening and recognition of human relations, several participants identified engaging with the families and providing supportive services as essential towards individual relationships. This was reflected in narratives such as the following:

"We strengthen the family through trying to give them tools and let them understand how to deal with certain issues, for example we have parenting programs in place we have parenting groups". (Participant D)

"Whilst working with the child, we engage with the family doing counselling as well as helping them to gain insight to able to see things differently". (Participant K)

The ability of frontline social workers to provide educational programs as well as supportive services have been recognised as critical towards the reinforcement of human relations. The Global Agenda (2012) proposes that social workers' capabilities to support people with psycho-social services as a way of facilitating people's inclusion through capacity building and social cohesion, allow interventions to focus on assisting with a reduction of social isolation. Overall, the analysis assisted the researcher with identifying the prominence of the educational programs and supportive services that frontline social workers engage in as essential in the strengthening and recognition of the importance of family relationships in the South African context.

#### **4.8.2    *Sub-theme 4.2: Mezzo level***

Below is a presentation of Categories (a), (b) and (c) and participants' descriptions that represented the frontline social workers' perceptions of their contributions towards strengthening of human relationships at a mezzo level.

#### **4.8.2.1      *Category (a): Social reintegration and networking***

Fonseca, Hart and Klink (2015:13) identified reintegration as an essential part of promoting family relationships. The above authors proposed that reintegration empowers and protects family members by providing them with the necessary tools and assistance for their reinsertion into their family or community. For successful reintegration to occur, there should be opportunities to become self-reliant, access to social networks as well as psychosocial health (Fonseca et al., 2015). Hence, social networking has also being regarded as an important element of reintegration, as it can provide information and assist through offering emotional support.

This was displayed in Participant C's narrative:

"When it comes in your attention that there is a child in danger, you first go and assess, is the child in danger and now can work with family. Is it alcohol abuse, try to help the mother or father to go for rehabilitation or can we take the child away as we try to help the family and re-integrate it".

To further reinforce the idea, Participant F also verbalised that:

"The integration of the family as social workers we are part of that..."

These narratives identify the importance of reintegration and social networking towards the strengthening of human relations at a mezzo level. Participants acknowledged the importance of rehabilitation, reintegration as well as social networking towards the strengthening of relationships. The narratives above seem to identify how the involvement of frontline social workers in reintegration and networking greatly contribute to people reunification by the providing of support structures for families and communities.

#### **4.8.2.2      *Category (b): Participate in skills training programs***

Even though a lack of resources was pointed out by participants as a challenge in offering social work services, the participants were able to identify their involvement or participation in skills training programs with families and groups as important towards relationship building. Dominelli (2010), Healy (2008b) and Kendall (2008) suggest that globally, the practice of social work has been greatly influenced by the challenges of underdevelopment, lack of resources and more detrimental effects of globalisation. When participants were asked to discuss their perceptions of their contributions towards the strengthening and recognition of human relationships at a mezzo level, the predominant narratives acknowledged frontline social workers' participation in skill training programs as crucial, hence supporting communities through skills development, which promote social inclusion through capacity building (Global Agenda, 2012). Some of the participants indicated that they engage in skills training programs with families or groups and these narratives are herewith presented:

"We strengthen families by trying to give them tools. For example, we have parenting programs in place. We have a lot of things regarding the family and even with the high risk school drop-outs with children with challenging behaviours we do such a lot". (Participant D)

"We have behaviour modification groups where we work with children and go to history on how relationships are important". (Participant E)

An analysis of the preceding narratives reveal that most frontline social workers engage with individuals, families or groups in offering skills training. To strengthen human relationships, the family have been recognised as the hub and model for all other social relationships, with strong family bonds contributing to the building of trust, respect and working together with other members (Global Peace Convention, 2017). Therefore, recognition of the importance of human relations assist with the creation of warm and nurturing relationships.

#### **4.8.2.3      *Category (c): Involved within the whole community***

The participation of people in their own development is an outstanding feature as it results in the development of inner strength, empowerment and resilience, which will take people to the next level of development (Lombard & Twikirize, 2014:322). The

involvement of people in their own development have been documented in the Global Agenda (2012:4), as the Agenda encourages the promotion of strong inclusive communities that enable all members to participate and belong. Participation of community members was highlighted in participants' descriptions, which include the following:

"We cannot do it alone, we should focus on other resources in the community like, schools with everyone trying to put heads together in helping in the situation".  
(Participant H)

In support, Participant N said:

"We work with all people who does have impact on that specific child. So in order for us to be able to strengthen the child we must start with strengthening the family, community and even involve other institutions around".

Most of the narratives identified the inclusion of the community members at large as vital to promote social integration at a mezzo level. Healey and Wairire (2014:242) supported community inclusion, by identifying that community divisions seemed to threaten social integration, which requires social work programmes. The ability of participants to identify working with the whole community is essential in a South African context, as it is helpful in reducing tensions and promote inter-community dialogues and healing (Healy & Wairire, 2014).

#### **4.8.3 Sub-theme 4.3: Macro level**

Participants were asked to share their perceptions of their contributions towards promoting the strengthening and recognition of human relationships. The findings are discussed below under the identified Category (a).

##### **4.8.3.1 Category (a): Social work training and knowledge**

Even though most participants find it challenging to link their experiences of how they assist in the strengthening of human relations at a macro level, few participants indicated their ability to receive social work training as well as being equipped with relevant literature as helping at this specific level of intervention. The following

narratives identify the importance of receiving training as well as having a great understanding of social work literature (theory) in a South African environment:

“In terms of divorce it goes in to mediation, so I get involved and have done my accredited mediation training as a social worker”. (Participant A)

“We work from literature and also our experience as social workers”. (Participant F)

“According to systems theory, the child is a child within a family within the broader environment”. (Participant I)

The narratives above seem to link with what some prominent authors suggested about the application of social work theory in practical terms. Boisen and Syers (2004) suggest that competent social work practice should be grounded in the use of theory, as practice informed by theory distinguishes professional social work from informal forms of help. A number of theorists have also proposed the integration of social work literature in practice, as the authors identified the ability to apply social work theory in practice as an on-going reflective evaluation of practice, guided by current and emerging theoretical knowledge and research (Lam, 2004; Poulter, 2005; Sung-Chan & Yuen-Tsang, 2008; Thyer, 2001). Therefore, it can be deduced that the participants were able to identify having the base of social work theory as an anchoring frame in directing effective social work practice. Therefore, frontline social workers being involved in social work training as well as having a theoretical base, translates to specialised knowledge, which have been recognised as crucial towards promoting and recognising the importance of human relationships at a macro level. However, frontline social workers could be more involved in the development of indigenous theory, and to disseminate this on a macro level by publishing their findings in accredited social work journals and by informing policy formations (Ornellas et al., 2018).

#### **4.9 CONCLUSION**

In concluding the empirical chapter of the study, the researcher presented the perceptions of frontline social workers towards their contributions to the pillars of the Global Agenda in terms of themes, sub-themes, categories and narratives by the participants. Even though the study experienced challenges in collecting more in-depth



insights from the participants due to most participants presenting a lack of knowledge of what the Global Agenda is about, the narratives selected in this chapter represent the most articulated discourses. Much of the findings were more related to the actual activities that frontline social workers get involved in. The chapter that follows will offer integrated conclusions based on the key findings, followed by recommendations for social work practice in a South African context for future research.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The aim of the study has been centred on gaining an in-depth understanding of the frontline social workers' perceptions towards their contributions to the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. Much literature on the Global Agenda have been accessed, however no other research have been undertaken in relation to this specific topic in the South African context, except for the study of Raninga and Zelnick (2014), which paid attention to the experiences of social work students with regards to the implementation of the Global Agenda. Therefore, this chapter presents conclusions and recommendations formulated in accordance with the frontline social workers' perceptions towards their contributions to the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development.

#### **5.2 CONCLUSIONS**

The study conclusions will firstly be presented according to each pillar, and some integrated conclusions will then be provided. The conclusions below are offered within the context of frontline social work practice in the Western Cape Province, South Africa. The interviews were conducted between June and July 2018. The following conclusions were drawn from the pillars of the Global Agenda that were explored through participants' narratives in identifying their contributions. The pillars are as follows:

- Promoting social and economic equalities;
- Promoting the dignity and worth of people;
- Working towards environmental sustainability;
- Strengthening recognition of the importance of human relations.

##### ***5.2.1 Promoting social and economic equalities***

Within the South African context, social work and social welfare services are being approached from a developmental paradigm. Most participants were able to relate to their practice experience through identification of practical examples. The contributions that were identified are presented below.

#### Micro level

- In promoting social and economic equalities at micro level, frontline social workers' contributions are focussed on linking individuals, families and groups to organisations and institutions that provide resources to improve individuals', families' and groups' social and economic standards. Based on perceptions of the frontline social workers on their contribution to the Global Agenda at a micro level in promoting social and economic equalities in practice, SASSA was seen as a resource, which assists in ensuring social and economic equalities. Hence, social workers contribute to the Global Agenda on a micro level by contributing through identification of resources and linking vulnerable services users to resources.

#### Mezzo level

- At a mezzo level, frontline social workers are more involved in working with other organisations that provide educational skills. The most attention is being given to educating the users of services through skills training to ensure that service users are equipped with the relevant skills to enhance their employment opportunities. Therefore, the study conclude that frontline social workers contribute to the mezzo level in promoting social and economic equalities through skills development in an effort to try to bridge the unemployment gap.

#### Macro level

- At a macro level, social workers' contributions were identified through their involvement with other social service providers such as the Department of Social Development to facilitate applications of social grants. However, based on the account of frontline social workers on their contributions at a macro level, a gap was identified in that their involvement in policy formulation is not part of their primary responsibilities, but the responsibility of the top management.

The following deductions were drawn in relation to this pillar:

- Besides that social grants being identified as assisting towards meeting the basic needs (food and clothing) of service users in social work practice, frontline social workers admitted that the help that they provide is perceived as useful and meaningful. However, frontline social workers questioned the extent of the impact of social grants on the lives of services users, given the fact that the amount awarded by SASSA is argued to be insufficient for addressing the needs of service users. Hence, frontline social workers encourage services users to be more involved in job training and skills development.
- Most frontline social workers identify their involvement to be focussed exclusively on the micro and mezzo levels. Participants distance themselves from being part of the macro level as they refer to this specific level as the responsibility of management and not the responsibility of social workers. Hence, this clearly indicate the non-involvement of frontline social workers in policy formulation, which can be identified as creating a gap in their service delivery process.

### ***5.2.2 Promoting for dignity and worth of people***

Participants clearly recognised that effective practice is based on showing people respect and involving them in finding possible solutions to address their own problems, hence treating the users of services with dignity and worth. This was identified as frontline social workers' contribution to the Global Agenda by showing respect for the individual dignity and worth of a person when working with a diverse client system. Frontline social workers emphasised that South Africa is a diverse country with different races, cultures and belief systems, hence treating people with dignity and worth is seen as a specific distinct contribution of social work intervention.

#### **Micro level**

- Social workers engage with vulnerable individuals and families at a micro level. In promoting human dignity and worth, frontline social workers' contributions focus on working with all people in need without discrimination. Therefore, frontline social workers contribute through respecting individuals as well as protecting and promoting people's rights, which give service users a sense of dignity and worth.

### Mezzo level

- To promote human dignity and worth at a mezzo level, social workers engage with different groups such as the homeless, foreign nationals and schools. Social workers contribute by being competent and by being culturally aware of the different backgrounds of service users and how to show respect to each group's belief systems.

### Macro level

- On a macro level, social workers are working together with the business sector in assisting service users to acquire jobs, which in turn result in economic independency. It can be concluded that service users' lives change with the assistance received from frontline social workers with regards to employment, and this links with businesses for employment purposes. Hence, frontline social workers contribute through helping in restoring service users' feelings of worthiness as self-esteem is built.

The following was concluded in respect to this specific pillar:

- Remarkably, the evidence given by frontline social workers identified their ability to work with diverse service users without being discriminative in terms of race, religion, sexual orientation or nationality. The ability to work with diverse services users is considered to have a positive impact on the individuals' sense of worthiness. Hence, frontline social workers stressed that the ability to work with diversity is crucial towards improving dignity and worthiness of peoples.
- Lack of knowledge about services users' values and belief systems was identified as a challenge in strengthening professional relationships as well as the building of trust between frontline social workers and individuals, families, groups and communities. Therefore, it can be concluded that frontline social workers strive to be aware and accustomed to service user's values and belief systems, as South Africa is a diverse country, so as to ensure that peoples' sense of dignity and worth is promoted.

### **5.2.3 Working towards environmental sustainability**

In working towards environmental sustainability, frontline social workers perceived their contributions as limited. Frontline social workers considered promoting environmental sustainability in practice as the responsibility of other departments, such as Disaster Management and municipalities. However, frontline social workers managed to identify few activities they engage in at micro and mezzo levels

#### **Micro level**

- At this level, to promote environmental sustainability, frontline social workers are partly involved. Frontline social workers have a direct link with interaction systems like families and schools when presenting awareness programmes. Therefore, social workers are contributing through educating family units to issues such as the water crisis.

#### **Mezzo level**

- Social workers cooperate with other organisations which include fire management, local municipality and disaster management in providing safety training in schools, churches, groups or communities. Presenting awareness programs that assist communities become aware of possible safety measures was identified as the contribution of frontline social workers at this level.

#### **Macro level**

- In promoting environmental sustainability, frontline social workers are not being involved in interventions taking place at a macro level at all. A gap was identified, as frontline social workers do not perceive this as their contribution to make, but the responsibility of other social service departments for example firefighting and Disaster Management.

The key ideas that were raised under this theme was:

- In relation to environmental sustainability, departments for example Disaster Management and municipalities always intervene. As a result, frontline social workers considered the promotion of environmental sustainability as not

their responsibility. Therefore, the study concluded that there is a need for frontline social workers to become more active and be educated on issues that concern the environment, as social workers work with people within a specific environment in the ecology, which has a specific impact on service users in many ways.

#### **5.2.4 Strengthening recognition of the importance of human relationships**

The participants illustrated the capacity to strengthen relationships amongst families, groups and communities as a crucial contribution in recognition of this specific theme. Frontline social workers work with families, helping to strengthen family relationships as they engage with families as well as become involved in the re-integration process of families.

##### **Micro level**

- At a micro level, frontline social workers are actively involved with children and families. Involvement at this level is aimed at promoting and enhancing strong family ties with a sense of belonging. Frontline social workers' identified their contributions to strengthening the recognition of the importance of human relationships that is focused on children and family interventions. Moreover, frontline social workers also identified their contributions at a micro level through working with youths who are in conflict with the law. The contribution at this level focuses on skills and re-integrating the youth back to their families.

##### **Mezzo level**

- At a mezzo level, frontline social workers are getting involved in re-integration processes and skills training where they work, together with training institutions such as colleges, to provide skills training to individuals who might be at risk of committing a crime. Hence, frontline social workers' contributions are focused on skills development and encouragement of the formation of strong relationships amongst youth at risk, together with other institutions.

## Macro level

- At a macro level, frontline social workers find it difficult to clearly identify their contributions in relation to strengthening and recognition of the importance of human relationships. Hence, frontline social workers could not point out their contribution at a macro level.

More specifically, the following was identified:

- Frontline social workers pointed out their contributions in strengthening recognition of the importance of human relationships with regards to the involvement with families in building strong family relationships. Hence, social workers strongly identified the promotion and the improvement of individuals' well-being, as well as positive behaviour changes. The focus is thus on encouraging relationships amongst individuals and their families.

## 5.3 INTEGRATED CONCLUSIONS

The following are integrated conclusions that are drawn from the four pillars of the Global Agenda in relation to frontline social workers' contributions:

- Most of the frontline social workers identify their contribution to the Global Agenda as more focussed on working with children and families. Hence, this is an indication that social workers are more involved at micro and mezzo levels, and focusing more on child and family interventions.
- All frontline social workers interviewed are holders of a Bachelors or Master's degree in social work. Participants managed to identify the different theories and literature they integrate in different situations to assist them in their intervention processes. Therefore, the importance of social work literature or knowledge was identified as being of high importance to guide frontline social workers in practice.
- Frontline social workers have strong working relationships with other professionals. This was highlighted through social workers' ability to link individuals and work with other institutions in empowering people.
- South African welfare policies (such as the White Paper for Social Welfare, 1997) promote the involvement of frontline social workers with the most vulnerable individuals by empowering them. It has been acknowledged by the participants



through their involvement in skills developing programmes with marginalised individuals.

- The ability of frontline social workers to facilitate the application process of social assistance grants to benefit services users is essential, as it addresses specific needs.
- Participants also spelled out the importance of service users gaining a clear understanding of the role and purpose of social workers, thus promoting the achievement of intended interventions goals.
- In the South African context, child protection services are of great importance as they protect children from various forms of abuses for example neglect, sexual and physical abuses. Hence, frontline social workers position themselves in promoting strong working relationships between various systems (family, schools, organisations and other social professionals like psychologists) at different levels (micro, mezzo and macro).
- Insufficient resources was admitted to limiting frontline social work implementation of the Global Agenda as well as having confidence to provide effective social services in communities.
- A gap was identified in terms of social workers' roles and top management duties. Frontline social workers perceived their social work interventions at a micro level as focussed on engaging with individuals and at a mezzo level as working together with various organisations. At a macro level, frontline social workers perceived policy formulation as the responsibility of the organisations' top management. This was seen as breaking the string in terms of the implementation of policies, as top management engage in policy formulation without a clear understanding of the factual experiences in communities.

#### **5.4 CONCLUSIONS ON THE ATTAINMENT OF THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study focused on gaining an understanding of the perceptions of frontline social workers on their contributions towards the pillars of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development.

The objectives of the study were to:

- To analyse the context of social work services in South Africa within the ecological systems perspective based on the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare 2016;

This objective was achieved in Chapter 2 of the study, whereby social work services in South Africa were examined in relation to the levels of the ecological systems perspective. This was done by identifying the three levels of the ecological systems perspective and examining the influence of the Comprehensive Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare (2016) in social work practice in a South African context.

- To present an overview of the four pillars of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development.

The objective was reached through the compiling of Chapter 3 of the study, which scrutinised the four pillars of the Global Agenda and indicating what commentators say about the pillars. It was done through critically analysing each pillar, supported by relevant theory, and to present a clear understanding of each pillar.

- To explore the frontline social worker's perceptions of their contributions towards the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development.

The objective was accomplished in Chapter 4. The findings from the 17 frontline social workers were presented. Narratives were extrapolated, analysed and discussed in the form of themes, sub-themes and categories. The themes were matched to sub-themes, categories and participants' narratives, and analysed in relation to the levels of the ecological systems perspective (micro, mezzo and macro).

- To draw conclusions and present recommendations to social workers in South Africa on the contributions of frontline social workers concerning the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development at micro, mezzo and macro levels.

In Chapter 5, specific conclusions were presented, and the recommendations will be presented next.

## **5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Since the theoretical underpinning of the study is based on the ecological systems perspective, recommendations posed to frontline social workers will be integrated in terms of different systems to bring the findings of the study to a synthesis. The following is recommended:

#### **5.5.1 *Micro Level***

- At a micro level, frontline social workers' involvement with children and families is an essential component of supporting the developmental paradigm in South Africa. It is recommended that frontline social workers must have knowledge and an understanding of, and be aware of the social services available for children and families that are in support of the promotion of the Global Agenda.
- Provision of services and programmes aimed at improving services users' quality of life is essential in social work practice. Therefore, it is recommended that social workers must be at the centre of designing and creating programmes that are in line with the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development.
- Social workers are ethically obligated to contribute to the knowledge base of the profession and share with colleagues their knowledge related to practice, research and ethics. Therefore, it is recommended that frontline social workers with knowledge of the Global Agenda, should advocate the contribution of social workers to the Global Agenda on various levels.
- Considering that referrals are an essential integral element of human services delivery in the provision of social services by social workers, it is recommended that frontline social workers should refer clients to other social workers with specialised knowledge or expertise (e.g. school social workers, clinical social workers) with whom they work in the scope of their practice.

#### **5.5.2 *Mezzo Level***

- At a mezzo level, the building of strong professional relationships amongst social workers and community members is of paramount importance. Therefore, it is recommended that different sectors in the social development sector as a whole become educated about the roles of social workers, as well as the focus of social

work as a profession. This will promote working together to influence positive change, hence promoting the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. The social work profession, specifically at an organisational level, should take the lead in clarifying potential roles of the social work profession to other sectors, such as the education sector and health care sector.

- It is recommended that social workers should continue to build strong ties with other sectors in social development in promoting the Global Agenda, focussing on identifying and generating more resources to ensure that service users are connected to more relevant and helpful resources.
- To ensure that the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development is incorporated into social workers' practice, it is recommended that social workers' performance evaluation in organisations should contain components of the Global Agenda, on which frontline social workers may be evaluated.

### **5.5.3 Macro Level**

- Frontline social workers have direct interaction with individuals, groups and communities on a daily basis. Therefore, it is imperative that social workers become more involved at a macro level in order to have an influence on policy formulation; to be able to gain a greater understanding and to encourage social change at the highest level.
- Having the Department of Social Development (DSD) being mandated to coordinate and oversee the provision of social services in the South African context, it is recommended that the DSD should buy into the Global Agenda and incorporate it in social development programmes.
- Frontline social workers should be awarded the opportunity to attend more skills development training and conferences to further their skills. In addition, the National Department of Social Development should provide incentives to local organisations. This may motivate frontline social workers to engage at micro, mezzo and macro levels with the development of indigenous practice, such as using local ways of solving problems in indigenous communities to promote social justice.
- Educators or field instructors in social work education, training and development are ethically obligated to provide knowledge on the most current information

available in the profession. It is recommended that universities should include the content of the Global Agenda in their curriculum. Furthermore, universities should engage with social welfare organisations to ensure that social work students in practice provide services which seek to promote the Global Agenda.

#### **5.5.4 *Future research***

- The actual implementation of the Global Agenda pillars in social work practice in different organisational contexts is of great concern. Therefore, both qualitative and quantitative research endeavours regarding the actualisation of the Global Agenda, on a national level, is recommended as this study identified some gaps in frontline social workers' involvement and contributions at micro, mezzo and macro levels of intervention.

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## **ANNEXURE 1**

### **THEMES FOR INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR FRONTLINE SOCIAL WORKERS**

The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. (the Agenda) was designed by the IFSW, IASSW and ICSW to strengthen the profile of social work and to enable social workers to make a stronger contribution to policy development; and was developed in response to the increased global complexity in which we all live and work. This process started in 2004.

The goal of the research is to gain an understanding regarding the perceptions of frontline social workers in South Africa (Western Cape) on their contributions towards the four pillars of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. . Hence, the goal of the research is not to determine whether YOU operationalize the pillars of the Global Agenda, but it is rather focused on how YOU perceive YOUR contributions of YOUR work towards the pillars of the Global Agenda in terms of (1) social and economic equalities, (2) dignity and worth of peoples, (3) environmental sustainability, and (4) human relationships. There is thus not a right or wrong answer – I am merely interested in YOUR PERCEPTIONS as I want to gain an UNDERSTANDING of your perceptions. Hence you are asked to elaborate comprehensively on my questions.

#### **1. Biographical information of participants**

1.1. What are your qualifications in social work?

1.2. Years of practice as a Social Worker?

1.3. Describe your work environment and context

- type of organization;
- service users;
- nature of work;
- any significant policies guiding the organization and your work

#### **2. Participants' perception on the Global Agenda for social work and social development**

- 2.1. Are you familiar with the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development? If yes, please share your understanding of the Global Agenda. If No, Have the organization or any social work professional body talked about it in meetings or workshops?
- 2.2. What is your perception about the Global Agenda?

### 3. Participants' perceptions on their contribution towards the pillars of the Global Agenda

#### 3.1. Promoting social and economic equalities

What do you think are your contributions in your work towards the promotion of social and economic equalities on micro, Mezzo and macro levels (e.g., assisting in addressing the increased vulnerability of poor people, growing inequalities)? *Explain your answer and give a specific example on each level.*

#### 3.2. Promoting the dignity and worth of people

What do you perceive as your contributions in relation to the pillar of dignity and worth of people (considering aspects like: respect for diversity and different belief systems, access to resources for all etc.). *Explain your answer and give a specific example on each level.*

#### 3.3. Working towards environmental sustainability

Do you, in any way, promote environmental sustainability on micro, mezzo and macro levels in your work (e.g. prevention, mitigation and response on human and natural disasters, and changes in the environment)? *Explain your answer and give a specific example on each level.*

#### 3.4. Strengthening recognition of the importance of human relationships

How do you influence the strengthening and recognition of the importance of human relationships on micro, mezzo and macro levels in your work (e.g. social integration and cohesion of vulnerable individuals, families, groups and communities)? *Explain your answer and give a specific example on each level.*

### 4. General contribution towards the pillars of the Global Agenda



Do you think that social workers in South Africa contribute in general to the pillars of the Global Agenda? *Motivate your answer.*

## **ANNEXURE 2**

### **INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPANTS**

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by **Netsayi Mwoyounazvo** from the Department of Social Work at Stellenbosch University. You were selected as a possible participant in this specific study because you are a qualified frontline social worker.

#### **Research Topic**

To gain an understanding of the perceptions of frontline social workers on their contributions towards the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. .

#### **Procedures**

If you agree to participate in this study, you would be asked to be available at your most convenient time and this will be agreed upon by you and the researcher.

A semi-structured interview will be used, and you need not indicate any of your particulars.

#### **Confidentiality**

The research is going to consider all the interviews as confidential. The data obtained in the study will be handled as confidential information, it will not be shared with anyone, but used as a data of the study anonymously. All the recorded information will be managed, analysed and processed by the researcher and the data will be kept securely. The study anticipates no risk and discomfort to participants.

#### **Participation and withdrawal**

You can openly choose to participate or not in this study. If you volunteer to be in the study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. If there are certain questions that you might feel uncomfortable to respond to, you may skip them and remain in the study.

#### **Payment**

No payment will be awarded for participating in the study.

Potential benefits of the study

The results of this study will allow insight into an understanding of the perceptions of the frontline social workers on their contributions to the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development at micro, mezzo and macro levels.

Student-researcher identification information

If you have any uncertainties about the research, please feel free to contact the study supervisor, the Department of Social Work at Stellenbosch University. Tel. 021-808 2488, Email: [zfzimba@sun.ac.za](mailto:zfzimba@sun.ac.za) (Dr Z.F Zimba).

Participant

The information above was described to me the participant

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study.

Name of participant \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigators

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to \_\_\_\_\_ (name of subject/participant). (He / She) was encouraged to ask questions. This conversation was conducted in English and no translator was used.

Signature of investigator \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## ANNEXURE 3

### Notice of Approval to execute the research from the Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee



#### NOTICE OF APPROVAL

##### REC Humanities New Application Form

24 April 2018

Project number: 6737

Project Title: PERCEPTIONS OF FRONTLINE SOCIAL WORKERS ON THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE GLOBAL AGENDA FOR SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Dear Ms. Netsayi Mwoyoumazvo

Your REC Humanities New Application Form submitted on **28 March 2018** was reviewed and approved by the REC: Humanities.

Please note the following for your approved submission:

#### Ethics approval period:

Protocol approval date (Humanities)	Protocol expiration date (Humanities)
24 April 2018	23 April 2021

Please take note of the General Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

**If the researcher deviates in any way from the proposal approved by the REC: Humanities, the researcher must notify the REC of these changes.**

Please use your SU project number (6737) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your project.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

#### FOR CONTINUATION OF PROJECTS AFTER REC APPROVAL PERIOD

Please note that a progress report should be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee: Humanities before the approval period has expired if a continuation of ethics approval is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary)

#### Included Documents:

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Research Protocol/Proposal	PROPOSAL FINAL CLEARANCE	27/03/2018	
Data collection tool	THEMES FINAL	27/03/2018	
Informed Consent Form	CONSENT FINAL	28/03/2018	

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at [cgraham@sun.ac.za](mailto:cgraham@sun.ac.za).

Sincerely,

Clarissa Graham

REC Coordinator: Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number: REC-050411-032.  
The Research Ethics Committee: Humanities complies with the SA National Health Act No.61/2003 as it pertains to health research. In addition, this committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research established by the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) and the Department of Health Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.) 2015. Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.